



5-2016

# Replacing Periods With Question Marks: A Study of the Role of Public Education in Kanawha County, West Virginia

Sarah Michelle Engell  
*University of Pennsylvania*

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# Replacing Periods With Question Marks: A Study of the Role of Public Education in Kanawha County, West Virginia

## **Abstract**

In 1974 the proposal and adoption of new language arts textbooks, that sought to emphasize themes of multiculturalism and egalitarianism, sparked a violent year-long protest in Kanawha County, West Virginia. The opposition perceived the texts as overly sexual, anti-American, and intrusive while supporters celebrated the diversification of narratives and information.

The ability of newly adopted language arts textbooks to spark an explosive controversy reflects the impact of textbooks and, more broadly, public education on creating a sense of identity and belonging. Through objecting or supporting the textbooks and the language they contained, the citizens of Kanawha County were bitterly fighting to protect their own definitions of what it meant to be a good student, parent, teacher, community member, and American. Furthermore, through protesting and ultimately reworking the process of textbook adoption and inclusion, the citizens redefined who and what was included in their notion of a good public school education.

The research seeks to understand how a community's perception of public education and the role it should play in a child's life impacts the inclusion of the public in academic decision making as well as the insertion and definition of controversial matter in the classroom. In addition, the research seeks to better understand the triangulation of rights in public school between students, teachers, and parents.

## **Disciplines**

Education | United States History

## **Comments**

This paper was part of the 2015-2016 Penn Humanities Forum on Sex. Find out more at <http://www.phf.upenn.edu/annual-topics/sex>.

REPLACING PERIODS WITH QUESTION MARKS: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF  
PUBLIC  
EDUCATION IN KANAWHA COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

Sarah Michelle Engell

2015–2016 Penn Humanities Forum Undergraduate Research Fellow  
University of Pennsylvania

An Honors Thesis in History Presented to the Faculty of the  
Department of History of the University of Pennsylvania  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Antonio Feros, Honors Seminar Director

Kathy Peiss, Thesis Advisor

Siyen Fei, Undergraduate Chair, Department of History

*For all those who teach me how to both criticize and celebrate the world.*

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest appreciation for my advisors, Professor Kathy Peiss and Professor Antonio Feros. Thank you for your invaluable support and guidance throughout this process. All of the researching, writing, and rewriting was made much easier by your positive encouragement and critical feedback. I cannot thank you both enough.

Of course, I would not have been able to write this thesis or accomplish anything without my incredible parents. I do not express enough how deeply appreciative I am of all that you do for me. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleaders and for pushing me to always question, explore, and think critically about the world around me. Thank you for prioritizing my education above all else and for making our home a place of learning.

A much deserved thank you is also necessary for the phenomenal public school teachers of Longmeadow, Massachusetts. To all of my teachers who made me excited to learn every day and believed in my abilities, thank you.

And lastly, but never least, thank you to my classmates and friends. You are all a constant source of inspiration, support, and laughter.

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“You are making an insidious attempt to replace our periods with your question marks.”

–Emmett Thompson, resident of Kanawha County, West Virginia<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

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<sup>1</sup> Cowan, Paul. *The Tribes of America: Journalistic Discoveries of Our People and Their Cultures*. New York: New Press, 2008, 83.

I first discovered Kanawha County, West Virginia tucked into a few pages of a book about the rise of conservatism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I had no idea that I would dedicate so much of my year to reading, thinking, and writing about its history, people, and protest. As I began to explore controversies within public education from a historical and cultural perspective, the violent textbook conflict that erupted in a West Virginia county in the mid-1970s provided a fascinating case study.

Upon the start of my research I vaguely articulated that I sought to better understand the complexities of teaching morality in public schools. I wanted to comprehend how a local community's culture, religion, and politics influenced their perception of the role public education should play in shaping their children's moral compasses. An in-depth analysis of one county could hopefully better illuminate the broader discourse of public education's place within the nation. Initially I posed a multitude of questions including, what purpose do we want public education to serve? How does the teaching of sexual education and history influence an individual's sense of identity? Who is and should be dictating complex narratives to our children? How "truthful" should these narratives be? Can such narratives be standardized within a country as diverse and staunchly independent as the United States?

As research progressed my guiding questions became more specific. Rather than focus on the complexities of teaching history and sexual education in isolated courses, the controversy in Kanawha County presented a different opportunity. The backlash within the county began because of proposed language arts textbooks, thus the research shifted to comprehending perceptions of morality intertwined with the historical and sexual narratives presented within the language arts curriculum. I then began to ask, how could



textbooks containing such narratives mobilize community members to act so violently, even though most protesters did not read the textbooks? Were the sentiments that led to the community uproar specific to this county? How could the protest voices be better distinguished? Who has the right to control the curriculum, taxpaying parents or professional educators? What do students have the right to learn in public classrooms? What is at stake when public schools do not teach controversial matter?

The questions I posed have been asked and debated over and over throughout the entirety of public education's existence in the United States. An immense literature has been produced by the continued debate and the lack of concrete answers. The most useful histories of public education for my research included Natalie Mehlman Petrzela's *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture*, David B. Tyack's *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society*, Diane Ravitch's *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide*, Ira Shor's *Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration*, and Jonathan Zimmerman's *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools*. Each author provided unique perspectives that contextualized my questions and helped me to create a working knowledge of the history of public education controversies.

In regards to the Kanawha County controversy, a number of dissertations, chapters of books, and one entire book have been written. Specifically, I utilized the works of Carol Mason, Don Goode, and Catherine Candor. Their insights and information greatly expanded my understanding of the controversy and the community.

Carol Mason's book, *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy*, is a thorough documentation of the

events that unfolded and the people involved. The interviews she conducted as well the perspectives she brought as a local resident of Kanawha County were useful to fill in gaps in my primary research. Mason argues that the controversy created a redefining of white ethnicity and forever changed conservative politics. She spends most of her book focused on the major actors and the political implications of the controversy.

Don Goode's dissertation, "A Study of Values and Attitudes in a Textbook Controversy in Kanawha County, West Virginia: An Overt Act of Opposition to Schools" provides an empirical study of ideals. The dissertation sought to address an insufficiency of available empirical research on the attitudes and values of those individuals involved in overt acts of opposition to the public school. The background information provided was useful in better understanding the controversy and Goode's analysis of values sparked further questions for my research.

Catherine Candor's dissertation, "A History of the Kanawha County Textbook Controversy, April 1974-1975," presented an immensely helpful summary of the events. Her work was beneficial in cross-checking the dates and facts of my own primary research as well as filling in spaces within the timeline of the controversy.

I am also incredibly indebted to the work of Shirley Smith, an archivist at the West Virginia State Archives who compiled eight pristinely maintained scrapbooks of the controversy. I am cognizant that the information and materials compiled in the scrapbooks potentially project Smith's own interpretation of the events and preserve the image of her county that she chose to present to future viewers. However, given the diversity and range of the materials preserved, I feel fairly confident that Smith assembled the controversy materials fairly and professionally.

Though the questions that guided my research are not unique, I seek to add a fresh perspective on the impact of textbooks and the balancing of rights between students, parents, and teachers to the existing literature about Kanawha County and the much broader canon of public education histories. I also hope to show the significance of trust in all interactions within the public education system. Too often the questioning of the role of public education is asked in politically estranged settings with fingers pointed at the opposition. Although the works mentioned above were immeasurably useful to my research, for the most part their words were laden with political biases and less than subtle disdain for those who disagree. In addition, the nuanced voices of the community and protest were absent from the existing literature written about the controversy.

In the following pages I have sought to reflect upon the value of avoiding such simplistic community divisions and the necessity of public schools that teach students how to disagree and debate. I begin my writing with a contextualization of the controversy within shifts in educational pedagogies as well as the structure and legislation regarding West Virginia public schools and textbook adoptions. The first chapter concludes with a brief timeline of the controversy's events. The second chapter is devoted to distinguishing and analyzing the many voices of the protesters. Lastly, I conclude with an analysis of the impact of the controversy on the county, specifically understanding the community dialogue post-conflict and the changes to the perceptions of the role of public education.

Throughout this entire process I have felt a deep sense of responsibility to the citizens of Kanawha County, both past and present. Though I was only physically there for ten days this past May, I was struck by and deeply appreciative of the warmth and

hospitality of the community I encountered, not to mention the beauty of the state. Beyond the amazing help of the archivists, each and every person I encountered in the archives was more than willing to discuss the controversy and their connection to it. In addition to the formal interviews I conducted, I had countless informal conversations with locals about why I was writing and how they could contribute to my knowledge. All of the conversations reemphasized to me the importance of approaching this controversy, and others like it, with a mind open to understanding the beliefs and motivations of all those involved, rather than simply drawing divisive lines. In addition, I at times struggled to find my own voice amongst the many of the protest for the hesitating fear of misrepresenting their beliefs. Hopefully I have moved beyond that while remaining true to their sentiments.

## **Chapter One: Protesting Public Education**

*“Public education should be the greatest feature in our democratic society. Every time you weaken people’s belief in the system, our world is weakened.”<sup>2</sup>*

Americans have been debating the role of public education in a child’s life for centuries. Nearly forty years ago, one such debate sparked a violent year-long controversy in Kanawha County, West Virginia. Walkouts across the community were organized, school buses were shot at, parents were arrested, and school buildings were bombed.

The protests greatly impacted the community’s perception of the role of education and the inclusion of the public in academic decision making. The ferocity of the conflict spurred the recognition of the profound effect of schooling, where students learn to think, communicate, and socialize, on the development of an individual’s sense of identity and community. When new curriculum is proposed and or adopted, as it was in the form of 325 new language arts textbooks in Kanawha County in 1974, questions and fears arise about the power of public education and its potential to alter commonly held values.

Central to such fears are the differing understandings of the purpose of public education. Though public school classrooms have consistently been celebrated as a “key site for crafting an ethical citizenry,” an agreed upon method for creating such citizens remains allusive.<sup>3</sup> If the objective of schooling is to create critical thinkers and decisions makers by introducing controversial subject matter, curriculums and textbooks will look

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<sup>2</sup> Charlie Loeb, George Washington High School Student Body President, Kanawha County, 1974-1975.

<sup>3</sup> Petrzela, Natalia Mehlman. *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture*. 2015, 172.

very different from those embraced by people who believe schools should act neutrally to contain cultural and political shifts, free from discussing controversial topics in classrooms.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the controversy reflected deep apprehension towards parents feeling distanced from their children. Is public education meant to increase and expand knowledge with each generation or should children generally learn the same information that their parents did?

The proposed textbooks stirred community members to violence with lessons and narratives considered, among other claims, to be anti-religious, anti-American, and overtly sexual. One lesson asked students to invent their own gods, which some parents felt suggested that God himself was an invention. Other parents protested the textbooks that included the My Lai massacre in its discussion of the Vietnam War, feeling the event was unnecessary to mention and simply caused shameful feelings about America amongst students. In addition, a E.E. Cummings poem stating, “I like my body when it is with your body,” was hailed as far too sexually suggestive for a classroom. Other protested authors included Allen Ginsburg, Eldridge Cleaver, George Orwell, Malcolm X, and Sigmund Freud. These examples of protested material and more will be expanded upon later.<sup>5</sup>

### Shifting Public Education Philosophies

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<sup>4</sup>Petrzela, *Classroom Wars*, 174.

<sup>5</sup> July 23, 1975, The Daily Mail, “State-Spawnd Protest Explodes Across Nation.”

When creating the public education system in the early days of the nation, the founding fathers desired a “religious, but nonsectarian, foundation for morality.”<sup>6</sup> George Washington believed that the more homogenous citizens can be made in principles, opinions, and manners, “the greater will be our prospect of permanent union.”<sup>7</sup> Conflicts in classrooms were avoided through the emphasis on nonpartisanship.<sup>8</sup>

Following these notions, various definitions of the common school and its relationship with religion emerged. First is the completely secular education, such as a master gives an apprentice, in which religion plays no part. Next is moral education, which instructs children in the fundamental tenets of duty which are common to all religions. Last is religious education, which cannot be undervalued “but the State does not intend to give.”<sup>9</sup> This concept of public schools as the deliverer of a moral education that is distinctly separate from religious teaching, yet somehow relevant to all religions is hugely significant and will be expanded upon in later chapters.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, education was redefined to be understood as, “whatever the community around it wanted it to be.” The belief was espoused that if the public schools belonged to the public, then the majority of voters or school board members have the power to determine the purpose and direction of the school. This conflict between the

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<sup>6</sup> Tyack, David B. *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Tyack, *Seeking Common Ground*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Tyack, *Seeking Common Ground*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Ravitch, Diane. *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1995. 23.

will of the majority and the rights of the minority continues to prove pivotal in the education battle.<sup>10</sup>

An opposing definition of the role of the public school, popularized by Horace Mann in the 1840s, states that a public school accepts public control but limits the community's power to indoctrinate its view. The public school is an instrument of the state and the state should neither subdue opinions nor hold any of its own. Therefore, the school must avoid any form of sectarianism and must teach only the values that are commonly held. Within this definition, the notion of commonly held values often becomes contentious as, "common values at one point in time may not be held a decade later...and the need to adjust to dissident views guarantees a constant potential for conflict between the school and the community." Furthermore, no school can wholly eliminate the teaching of values and beliefs, "for to do so would make it impossible to distinguish between right and wrong."<sup>11</sup>

Skipping ahead to more directly relevant issues within public education, the fear of communism in the decades following World War II greatly impacted perceptions of education. In the 1920s, progressive education emerged. Child-centered approaches to schooling, filled with more creativity, replaced rote memorization. However, as the country aligned against the Soviet Union post-WWII, progressive education was seen as not only outmoded but also too ideologically close to communism.<sup>12</sup> A return to "basics", discussed at greater length later in this chapter, was juxtaposed with federally sponsored

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<sup>10</sup> Ravitch, *National Standard*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Ravitch, *National Standards*, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Mason, Carol. *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy*. 2009, 9.



innovations in education in response to the space race. Educational innovations held a tricky balance between creativity and anticommunist efforts to identify “subversives” with the rampant McCarthyism of the 1950s.

Following fears of communism, the vilification of secular humanism in education began to spread. Secular humanism functioned as a code for liberal ideology that was supposedly anti-Christian.<sup>13</sup> The philosophy argued that ethical behavior can flow from the human intellect and a self-conscious conscience. Its attitude toward God and religion ranged from indifferent to hostile. The fear of secular humanism and its conflation and confusion with a quasi-religion, the humanities, and or humanistic education was used as justification for opposing textbooks and curriculum changes. As discussed in great length in the second chapter, many citizens felt that liberals were conspiring to replace Christian morals with secular ideology.<sup>14</sup>

The 1960’s and 1970’s witnessed other impactful shifts in education philosophies. One significant change was the rise of “values clarification” in the classroom. The values clarification method, first developed in the 1960’s, emphasized “the capacity of each child to arrive at his or her personal value system individually, steered only by a teacher’s guiding questions.”<sup>15</sup> This instruction argued that students had the potential to make beneficial choices from the, “many conflicting values in society.” By the 1970s, values clarification training was increasingly becoming the most popular teaching method, as more and more curriculums sought to emphasize themes of multiculturalism and

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<sup>13</sup> Mason, *Reading Appalachia*, 104.

<sup>14</sup> Berlet, Chip, and Matthew Lyons. *Right-wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort*, 2000, 204.

<sup>15</sup> Petrzela, *Classroom Wars*, 174.

egalitarianism. As the controversy in West Virginia evinces however, this method was often contested, as parents felt school should teach in dicta rather than discussion.

Another shift in public education pedagogies was the core curriculum crusade. The core curriculum movement sought to counter the moral diversity of the protest era and “restore a hierarchy of power threatened by egalitarian movements.”<sup>16</sup> It based its curriculum in Standard English, a “traditional” reading list, and cleansed versions of history.<sup>17</sup> Within the core curriculum movement, “the language of everyday life and the language of the left were declared illegitimate.”<sup>18</sup> In the central controversy of this research, conflict arose between proponents of the core curriculum movement and the Kanawha County Board of Education who sought to include more diverse narratives within the curriculum. Opponents of core curriculum crusade believed that a curriculum should prepare a student for “the fullness of life” and felt concerned that schools were espousing learning methods that created, “a rigidity that builds strong backs and weak minds.”<sup>19</sup>

Within these “cleansed versions” of history, underrepresented groups sought inclusion. African Americans, women, Native Americans, immigrants, and other groups wanted representation amongst the tales of the founding fathers and masculine war heroes. However, textbooks were continually constrained on what they could say and what students could learn about America. Texts remained focused on “positive images” of history. Even when textbooks increased their inclusivity, they remained silent or

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<sup>16</sup> Shor, Ira. *Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration, 1969-1984*. Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1986, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Shor, *Culture Wars*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Shor, *Culture Wars*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Shor, *Culture Wars*, 94.

neutral on any misgivings or negative portrayals of the country.<sup>20</sup> Many parents complained that textbooks presenting complex narratives of history and recent events, particularly racial issues, “foment agitation among black students and self-loathing among whites.” New information about minorities was not permitted to change the old beloved stories about peace, justice, and freedom.<sup>21</sup> The issue of including controversial narratives that complicate perceptions of America’s history within the language arts curriculum will be examined in the second chapter.

### Religion in Public Schools?

Central in the pedagogical changes in public education and the controversy in West Virginia was the role that religion should play in public education. The role of religion with public schooling has also been debated since its inception. During the 1940s and 1950s, a period of increased religious fervor, both liberals and conservatives believed in the importance of school-based religious education. Liberals emphasized the “social teachings” of the gospel and conservatives advocated its message of personal salvation.<sup>22</sup> However in the early 1960’s, the Supreme Court’s rulings in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) and *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963) prohibited state-sponsored prayer and Bible reading in public schools. These court cases encouraged conservative and fundamentalist Christians to fight harder for their beliefs. School prayer advocates revived older notions

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<sup>20</sup> Zimmerman, Jonathan. *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools*. 2002, 128.

<sup>21</sup> Zimmerman, *Whose America*, 118.

<sup>22</sup> Zimmerman, *Whose America*, 161.

of a “Christian America”. They purported that since the nation was founded and blessed “under God,” its public schools should respect the biblical order to worship God.<sup>23</sup>

Mel and Norma Gabler of Texas, a couple who became famous in the conservative textbook circles, sprang to action after the Supreme Court’s rulings. The couple opened a textbook screening company and believed that the trouble with most texts was, “that they are written from the perspective of people who do not believe in God...a religion of secular humanism, which permeates every aspect of contemporary society, and teaches youngsters to lie, cheat, and steal...” They believed that the Bible was the universal standard of learning.<sup>24</sup>

To the Gablers and the millions of other school prayer advocates, the court ordered ban on school prayer merely reflected an overall system of cultural decay in the 1960s. They detested the new spirit of openness and experimentation and felt that prayer in schools was necessary to counter the “flood of lewd and obscene shows and films, photographs and literature.” They desired a counterweight to the loosened sexual mores and attacks on family values they felt bombarded their children.<sup>25</sup>

This passionate debate about the role of religion in public schools included the questioning and protest of increased sexual education courses and discussion in public schools. As one mother put it, “The government and the people have taken God out and Prayer out of the schools and now they want to teach sex...without the Book that invented or started sex...” To opponents, sex education became a “symbol of everything

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<sup>23</sup> Zimmerman, *Whose America*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Shor, *Culture Wars*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Zimmerman, *Whose America*, 180.

that was promiscuous, permissive, and decadent in American life.”<sup>26</sup> Though sexual education curriculum will not be analyzed, the backlash against the inclusion of references to sexuality within language arts textbooks as well as the ability of public schools to provide informational handouts is expanded upon in later chapters.

### The Expansion of Intellectual Rights of Children

Simultaneous to shifting educational pedagogy, the intellectual rights of children were recognized and expanded upon. The doctrine of *in loco parentis*, defined as the legal responsibility of a person or organization to take on some of the functions and responsibilities of a parent, was called into question in the 1960’s. According to some, the doctrine was abolished with the 1969 Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*.<sup>27</sup> The case arose when a group of students was suspended for wearing black armbands in objection to the Vietnam War. Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas stated that neither students nor teachers “shed their Constitutional right to freedom of speech or expression at the school house gate.” Furthermore he stated that, “School officials do not possess absolute authority over their students. Students in schools as well as out of school are ‘persons’ under our Constitution...[and] are entitled to freedom of expression of their views.”<sup>28</sup>

This case was monumental. Beforehand, children had never been given the full protection of the Constitution. In addition, the case marked the beginning of the growing concern with students’ rights of expression, particularly within schools. The newly

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<sup>26</sup> Zimmerman, *Whose America*, 205.

<sup>27</sup> Krug, Judith. “Intellectual Freedom and the Rights of Children.” April 1973, 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 1969.

acknowledged constitutional protection expanded to the discussion of the intellectual rights of school children.<sup>29</sup>

First scholars and then students, teachers, and parents began to question whose rights should be prioritized within the context of the textbook controversy. Though much of the controversy was dictated by adults, the voices of Kanawha County students reflect their firm belief in their right to read certain textbooks and learn certain subjects, free of infringement by parents. These voices will be discussed in the second chapter at greater length.

### Structure of Public Education

The education of the public's children is a highly respected and valued ideal in the United States. This task however is left to each state to decide. States are responsible for establishing their own public schools, as a result of the Tenth Amendment which decrees that, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."<sup>30</sup> Each state has developed its own unique way of establishing and maintaining a public school system. Common to all states however is the acquiring of funding through taxation. Because of the public funding structure, American public schools are thought of as public institutions. Thus, the American people have certain expectations of such institutions and

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<sup>29</sup> Krug, Judith. "Intellectual Freedom and the Rights of Children." April 1973.

<sup>30</sup> "The Tenth Amendment," last modified January 1, 2016, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/tenth\\_amendment](https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/tenth_amendment).

the benefits received from them. Such expectations of benefits are dependent upon individual and community value systems.<sup>31</sup>

For the purpose of this research, a detailed explanation of the structure of public education in Kanawha County is vital in understanding the public's expectations, reactions and outrage to its decision making bodies. West Virginia state law requires that the school system be organized on a county-wide basis. As of 1974, the year of the controversy, the county of Kanawha comprised an area of 914 miles and 229,515 people lived in the county. 71,500 people lived within the city limits and 93,000 lived in small mining towns or scattered throughout the rural areas in the county. Less than 1 percent of the population was nonwhite and only 2.9 percent were first or second generation foreign born.

As of October 1, 1974, 48,000 students were enrolled in the public schools. At the time, the county contained around 13 per cent of the state's population and 13 per cent of its public school students. The population of Kanawha County was quite unique with its mixture of urban, suburban, and rural residents, a fact which contributed to the ferocity of the controversy. According to test scores, suburban schools tended to score highest and central city schools scored the lowest. Twenty-four per cent of the elementary schools had six or fewer professional staff members before the controversy.<sup>32</sup>

According to state law, the school board was composed of five members elected by the voters of the county without reference to political party affiliation. No more than two members could be elected from any one of the seven districts within the county and

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<sup>31</sup> Goode, Don J. "A Study of Values and Attitudes in a Textbook Controversy in Kanawha County, West Virginia: An Overt Act of Opposition to Schools." *WorldCat*, 28.

<sup>32</sup> Goode, "A Study of Values," 30.

election of the school board was for six-year staggered terms of office. At the time, generally the rural population felt it had been under-represented on the school board.

Two factors leading up to the controversy further soured the perception of the public school system in the minds of many community members. From 1964-1974, fifty schools were closed in an attempt to improve the overall quality of Kanawha County education. However, many rural communities felt that they had not been adequately involved with the consolidation process, which contributed to long-term resentment towards school officials.

In addition, the Kanawha County Curriculum Council disintegrated two years before the controversy. The council had been designed as a continuing committee of both public and professional personnel with a revolving membership tasked with the responsibility of recommending changes to the curriculum. Following changes in 1972, the committee was replaced with a new council of professional personnel only. A second committee was created of lay citizens, restricted to advisory powers. During the year of the controversy however, both of the committees were not formally organized, thus the community felt further excluded from academic decision making.<sup>33</sup>

### Expanded Background on County Citizens

As West Virginia University sociologist Dr. Franklin Parker wrote: “To understand why the book battle erupted here than elsewhere, why it broke with such violence and intensity, and why the storm occurred just when it did – one must know the

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<sup>33</sup> Candor, Catherine Ann. "A History of the Kanawha County Textbook Controversy, April 1974-1975." *WorldCat*, 51.



background of the Appalachian mountaineer: his fundamentalism, his fatalism, his religiosity, his fear of change, his frustrations, and his deep-seated angers...these are no ordinary people. They form a tinderbox of the old and the new in America, the fundamentalist antipathy to pragmatic materialism.”<sup>34</sup>

As mentioned above, the history of West Virginia and Kanawha County residents is rich and complex. Within the confines of this research, a few of the most relevant facets of the population are discussed.

Firstly, Kanawha County represents a unique blend of ideologies and cultures. Charleston is the capital of the state and the Kanawha County seat. The city, especially in 1974, was seen as an economic and urban center of the county and state. Surrounding Charleston are steep hills, bumpy roads, and twisting creeks that are home to small country towns such as Cabin Creek, Big Chimney, and Nitro. Known as the mountain state, West Virginia is characterized by rugged, beautiful countryside dotted with small, isolated communities.

No one set of values can be uniformly associated with Kanawha County in 1974, for both middle and professional classes coexisted with rural, urban, and suburban residents.<sup>35</sup> It is this blend of both common and disparate values that greatly influenced the controversy.

Another specifically pertinent facet of West Virginian's is their history of violence and protest. A tradition of toughness and violence grew from the early settlers of

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<sup>34</sup> Franklin Park, “The Battle of the Books; The Kanawha County Textbook Controversy; Or, Who Controls the Schools”, unpublished paper outline, West Virginia University, 1975.”

<sup>35</sup> Jack E. Weller, “Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia”, 1965, 65.

the state. In the 1920s, alcohol related violence erupted as the prosperous moonshine business grew out of the prohibition. Rival still owners clashed, often fatally, with each other and government agents. Upon the repeal of the Volstead Act, violence directly related to alcohol decreased but widespread violence throughout the state remained.

The Great Depression of the 1930's dealt a devastating blow to the Appalachian coal fields and to the mountaineers who depended heavily on the huge coal companies for work, housing, and medical care. Miners found themselves without jobs as the demand for coal dwindled. Bitterness between miners and their bosses increased. Fighting between the miners and the goon squads hired by their bosses ensued.

By the 1970's, the coal related violence had subsided and Kanawha County enjoyed stable growth from other industries such as chemical manufacturing.<sup>36</sup>

### Textbook Adoption Procedures in West Virginia

A working knowledge of the textbook adoption procedures specific to West Virginia at the time of the controversy helps to better contextualize the community's backlash.

In 1974, regarding all elementary schools, West Virginia state code required that all textbooks must be selected from the State Board of Education's multiple textbook lists.<sup>37</sup> Regarding secondary texts and supplemental books, such texts could be included

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<sup>36</sup> For a detailed discussion of the history of violence and protest in West Virginia and Appalachia, refer to "Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area," by Harry M. Caudill.

<sup>37</sup> West Virginia State law: "No textbook shall be used in any public elementary school in West Virginia as a basal textbook unless it has been approved and listed on the state

in a county adoption without prior approval of the State Board of Education. West Virginia state law also required that the textbook selection committees must be composed solely of professional educators.<sup>38</sup> This law clearly placed the responsibility of textbook selection in the hand of professional educators, not parents – an important fact within the controversy the erupted.

In Kanawha County, the English language arts committees were appointed in October of 1973 and began their study that same month. The committees, as mandated by state law, were completely composed of professional educators. The language arts textbook committees were provided with guidelines from the Curriculum and Instruction Division to ensure that adopted texts would be consistent with the general philosophy of continuous progress education and the implications of that philosophy in Kanawha County classrooms.

In addition, the West Virginia State Board of Education had adopted a resolution regarding inter-ethnic content, concept, and illustration in the selection of textbooks. The resolution, adopted in 1970, stated that: “The West Virginia Board of Education recognized the pluralistic nature of American society and the fact that minority and ethnic group contributions were an inextricable part of the total growth and development of the

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multiple list of textbooks by the state board of education...The state board of education may upon request by a county board of education, approve the adoption of additional books to meet the needs of specific children which were not provided for in the original adoption. Nothing in this section shall apply to the supplementary books that are needed from time to time.”

<sup>38</sup> West Virginia State law: “The county board of education shall, upon recommendation of the county superintendent with the aid of a committee of teachers not to exceed five members...select from the state multiple list one or more books or series of books for each subject and grade to be used as exclusive basal textbooks in the county for a period of five years.”

nation. Therefore, those charged with selecting textbooks shall select only those textbooks and materials for class use which accurately portray minority and ethnic group contributions to American growth and culture and which depict and illustrate the inter-cultural character of our pluralistic society.”<sup>39</sup>



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<sup>39</sup> State of West Virginia, Department of Education, "The Selection of Textbooks and Other Instructional Materials: Inter-Ethnic in Content, Concept, and Illustration", December 11, 1970.

<sup>40</sup> The Charleston Gazette, September 10, 1974

### The Kanawha County Textbook Controversy<sup>41</sup>

On March 12, 1974 the five member textbook selection committee presented its recommendations to the Board of Education for the adoption of an English Language Arts series. In addition to the basic book series, the committee recommended the adoption of some supplementary texts as well. Following the meeting the books were displayed at the Kanawha County Public Library for public examination. Notably, Alice Moore, the school board member credited for sparking the controversy, was absent from the meeting.<sup>42</sup>

At the following Board of Education meeting on April 11, 1974, Moore raised objections to the supplemental texts on the basis of dialectology degrading English standards and other complaints that the textbooks broke with traditional values. She cited a passage from “The Autobiography of Malcolm X” in which he states, "All praise is due to Allah that I moved to Boston when I did...If I hadn't, I'd probably still be a brainwashed black Christian," as an example. In defense of the books, Mrs. Nellie Woods, chairwoman of the selection committee, stated that the books offered “intellectual questions for understanding differences between people.” Despite Woods’ defense, Moore convinced the Board to pass a motion that they review the texts with the stipulation that if there were portions that they found objectionable, those portions would not be taught.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The timeline below provides a summary of the events. The second chapter will include in-depth discussion and analysis of the nuanced protest voices and their objections, as well a more detailed account of which textbooks were objected to.

<sup>42</sup> Goode, “A Study of Values,” 89.

<sup>43</sup> Goode, “A Study of Values,” 91.

The following month, the selection committee presented its rationale for selecting the textbooks. Between May and June, Moore began publicizing her objections to the books by selling homemade tape recordings of her review of the textbooks for \$1.50. On June 19, the Kanawha County Council of Parents and Teachers voted to oppose some of the books.<sup>44</sup>

Concern in the community grew. Ten religious leaders from the Charleston area announced their support for the books after having reviewed them and simultaneously, the Charleston branch of the NAACP endorsed the books.<sup>45</sup> On June 27, the day of the Board of Education meeting, twenty-seven local clergy made it a matter of public record that they were opposed to the textbook adoption. The Board of Education meeting was attended by nearly a thousand people. Protest and support loudly echoed through the hall as petitions and opinions were presented. After nearly three hours, the Board voted 3-2 to accept the books, only rejecting eight of the most controversial high school works.<sup>46</sup>

Tensions grew throughout the summer. On August 3, 1974 a group of anti-text people met for a rally and planned a boycott of Heck's, a discount store of which Russel Isaacs, a board member who had voted to adopt the texts, was president. When asked about the protest of his store, Issacs said, "Well I don't think it's fair [to protest my store] but it's their constitutional right and I'll defend their right to do so...I do not intend to quit the Board because of this."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Goode, "A Study of Values," 91.

<sup>45</sup> Goode, "A Study of Values," 92.

<sup>46</sup> Goode, "A Study of Values," 92.

<sup>47</sup> From archival tapes: C74-1342.

Towards the end of the summer multiple anti-textbook rallies were held with thousands of people attending. A group of parents calling themselves “Concerned Citizens” voted to boycott the Kanawha County Schools on the first day. Their efforts were successful as 20 per cent of the county’s students were reported absent on the first day.<sup>48</sup> Reverend Horan, one of the fervent anti-textbook protest leaders, stated that he hoped to gain greater success by taking more children out of the schools.<sup>49</sup>

As the days progressed, September witnessed growing anti-protest action. On September 4, 1974, textbook protesters set up pickets in the coal fields of rural Kanawha County. The miners honored the pickets and an estimated 3,500 miners walked off their jobs, virtually crippling the coal industry in the county.<sup>50</sup> Jail terms were threatened for the women who had attempted to join coal miners in their protest.<sup>51</sup> On September 10, 1974, 11,000 Kanawha Regional Transportation riders were left without transportation as public bus drivers joined in the protest.<sup>52</sup>

During mid-September, the Board of Education announced that all books of the language arts adoption would be submitted for review to a citizens committee appointed by Kanawha County Board of Education members and member-elect F. Douglas Stump. All supplemental texts, plus the Galaxy and D.C. Heath Series, would be removed from the classrooms during the review period. Each board member and Stump, the chairman,

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<sup>48</sup> September 3, 1974, The Charleston Gazette, “20% Absent First Day: Boycott Takes Its Toll”

<sup>49</sup> From archival Tapes: C74-1473.

<sup>50</sup> Goode, “A Study of Values,” 96.

<sup>51</sup> September 6, 1974, The Charleston Gazette, “Jail Terms Threatened in Protest”

<sup>52</sup> September 10, 1974, The Charleston Daily Mail, “Protesters Block School Buses Again”

would be permitted to select three persons to serve on this committee, which would represent a cross-section of the community.<sup>53</sup>

An archive recording shows Alice Moore struggling to make the announcement amidst a raucous crowd. Significantly she stated that, “If we took out every book right now, that wouldn’t change the direction of public education. We will only change the direction of public education by adopting guidelines.”<sup>54</sup> As the controversy concluded, Moore achieved her goal of establishing such guidelines.

Following the announcement, Superintendent Underwood announced that the Kanawha County Schools would be closed on Thursday and Friday because ““there’s apparently no way we can have law and order. Mobs are ruling and we’re extremely afraid somebody will be hurt. The safety of our children is our paramount objective.”<sup>55</sup> With a continuation of chaos, the protest turned violent as a man fired a gun into a crowd of protesters and the windshields at a local tractor-trailer rig were smashed.<sup>56</sup> No one was injured.

Following the violence, the protest slowed and work began on formal organization of a committee to review the books that sparked the controversy. The lull in boycott activities however was followed by the arrest of three ministers affiliated with the protest on September 14. The Rev. Avis Hill and Rev. Ezra H. Graley were sentenced and fined

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<sup>53</sup> September 11, 1974, The Charleston Daily Mail, “Citizens Committee to Review Books”

<sup>54</sup> From archival the tapes: C74-1519

<sup>55</sup> September 12, 1974, The Daily Mail, “Schools Stay Closed”

<sup>56</sup> September 14, 1974, The Charleston Gazette, “Man Panicked, Fired Gun, Lawyer Believes”



in Kanawha Circuit Court.<sup>57</sup> As Graley emerged from his 24-hour stint in jail he appeared more determined than ever to continue his fight. He also stated that he was able to teach a few delinquents about the power of God which made, “that night in jail...worth \$10,000 to [him].”<sup>58</sup>

At the end of September, the protesters submitted demands to the Board calling for the resignations of Dr. Underwood and the board members who had voted in favor of the texts. Reverend Graley was arrested for leading a protest group in front of the Board of Education despite an injunction and was quoted saying he was “praying that God would strike the three members of the BOE dead.”<sup>59</sup>

October opened with a positive note for the textbook supporters. The Kanawha Citizens for Quality Education held their first major public meeting with about four hundred people in attendance. The following week anti-textbook protesters held a telethon to raise money for their cause and netted about \$7,500.

On October 9, 1974 the controversy literally exploded as two elementary schools were hit with dynamite. No one was injured. The following day the United Mine Workers President Arnold Miller ordered all miners to return to work, stating that, “he fully respect[ed] the right of every citizens whether a UMWA member or not to protest what he or she feels are unsuitable educational materials...that is their right in a democracy. But there is no way to justify making thousands of innocent coal mining families lose

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<sup>57</sup> September 20, 1974, The Gazette, “Text Review Panel Starts Work Monday”

<sup>58</sup> From archival tapes: C74-1564

<sup>59</sup> Goode, “A Study of Values,” 99.

badly needed wage and pension fund royalties. It will not solve the textbook problem to shut down the mines, but it will create tremendous problems for West Virginia miners.”<sup>60</sup>

In mid-October, the Board of Education President Albert Anson resigned. The 22-year veteran of the school board said the “complete removal from the classroom of what I believe to be good books was more than I could accept.” He added that to “capitulate to mob rule would only encourage such action in the future. I still believe that these are good textbooks. They are not anti-Christian and anti-American as many people would have you believe. In fact, our children have learned more about un-American and un-Christian behavior in the past few weeks from some of the adult population than the schools could teach in 12 years.”<sup>61</sup>

Violence continued throughout the month of October as a third elementary school was hit with a fire bomb and a protester’s car was burned in front of her home. Though no one was injured in either event, the violence further sparked emotions.<sup>62</sup> On October 18, 1974 Superintendent Underwood tried to reach some type of compromise with the book protesters.

Underwood stated that, “I personally believe that it is just as wrong to force students to accept instructional materials to which they are ideologically opposed as it is to take those materials from others. Some people believe their children shouldn’t read certain materials. Others believe they should. We, as a school system, can guarantee there will be such an option.” Reverend Quigley rejected the motion and Alice Moore made it

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<sup>60</sup> October 10, 1974, The Gazette, “Miller Orders Return to Mines”

<sup>61</sup> October 11, 1974, The Charleston Gazette, “Board President Quits in Textbook Conflict”

<sup>62</sup> October 12, 1974, The Charleston Gazette, “Protester’s Car Burned”

clear that she would not accept the solution unless she could be guaranteed that no dissenting student would overhear discussion of the controversial books.<sup>63</sup> The next day, five shots were fired through the window of a school bus, though no children were yet aboard.

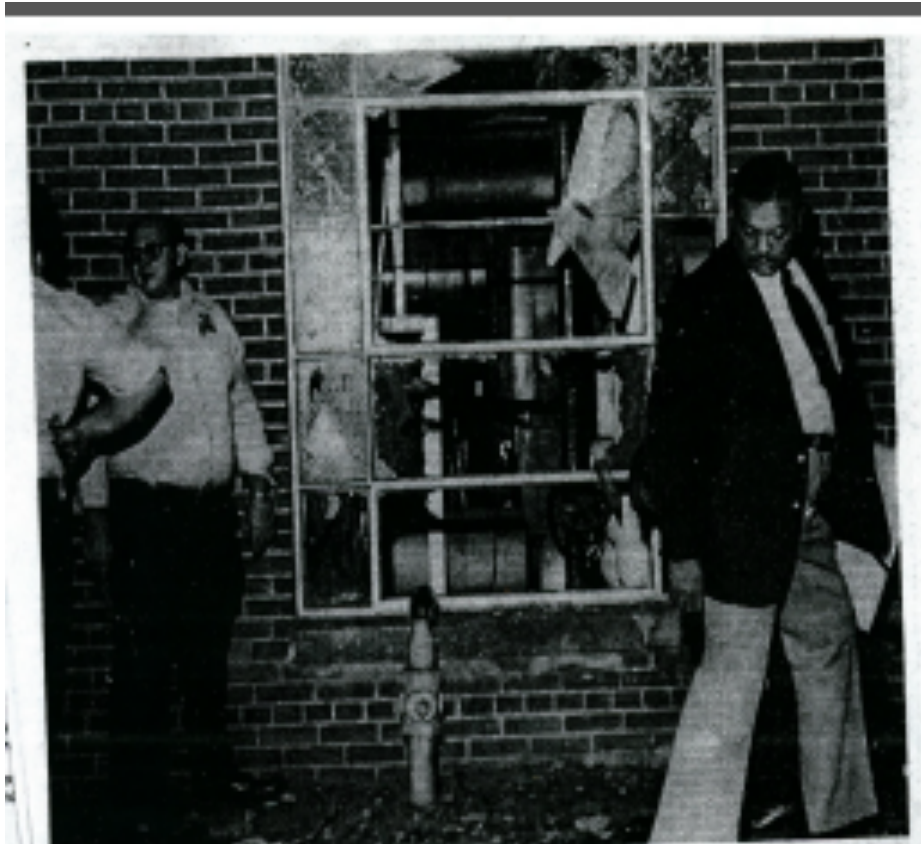
In light of the continued violence, less than 75 per cent of county schoolchildren attended school the week of October 22, 1974.<sup>64</sup> A week later a pro-textbook march and rally were held in downtown Charleston. Anson attended and stated that, ““It’s ironic that those who attack the books as un-American and un-Christian employ the most un-Christian and un-American tactics.” Some 4,000 book supporters gathered together.<sup>65</sup> The following day an estimated 5,000 people turned out for Reverend Horan’s anti-textbook rally.

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<sup>63</sup> Goode, “A Study of Values,” 103.

<sup>64</sup> October 22, 1974, The Charleston Gazette, “School Attendance Hits Low Point in Protesting”

<sup>65</sup> October 27, 1974, The Gazette, “Emotions Peak at Textbook Rally”



On Halloween, an explosion caused serious damage, though no injury, to the Kanawha County Board of Education offices. An estimated 15 sticks of dynamite were placed under the gas meter.<sup>67</sup>

On the same day, a splinter group of the school board-appointed textbook review committee recommended that a majority of the new selections be kept out of the school system. That minority recommendation was given to members of the board of education during a private meeting on October 28. It represented views of committee members who withdrew from the broader group several weeks before claiming their continued

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<sup>66</sup> November 1, 1974, *The Gazette*.

<sup>67</sup> October 31, 1974, *The Gazette*, "Explosion Rips Board Office; Bomb Probed Shortly After Meeting Concluded."

association with persons who tended to endorse the textbooks would make it impossible to complete the job of reviewing the selections.

A majority report on a portion of the over-all adoption was given to the board during a closed meeting on October 29. The larger selection committee suggested that several series and novels be returned to the classroom. At the same time, committee members urged the board to provide alternative materials to children of parents who are philosophically opposed to the new adoptions. The minority report contained nearly 500 pages.

These books were recommended for rejection:

Communicating Series, grades 1 through 6

Dynamics of Languages, grades 7 through 12

Projection in Literature, grade 11

United States in Literature, grade 11

Galaxy Series, grades 7 through 12

Language of Man Series

Interaction, level four

Over the Edge, part of Breakthrough Series

Man Series, levels 7 through 6

Concerns of Man Series

Black African Voices from Man in Literature Series

Literature of the Eastern World from Language of Man Series

Marquee

British Motifs

## American Models

### Quest

#### Write One

No recommendations were made on a number of titles, including “The Good Earth,” and “Moby Dick,” because committee members haven’t been given copies. A number of books in the adoption were approved by the splinter group. However, no list of those books was readily available.<sup>68</sup>

In early November the Board proposed that the D.C. Heath Communicating series, one of the most controversial of the texts, would be returned to the schools but not to the classrooms. The plan called for the books to be placed in school libraries along with an alternate series that met with the approval of the protesters. This plan was rejected by the protesters – a testimony to how deeply the protesters distrusted those in authority in the school system.

November 7 was a pivotal day in the controversy. The Board met to make its final decision on the books that had been removed. State police were brought to insure a peaceful assembly. Only two hundred spectators appeared at the seven thousand seat facility. The Board decided by a 4-1 vote – a compromise that they hoped would placate both sides. The Board agreed to return most of the controversial texts to the classrooms but would require no students to use books which their parents found objectionable; parents would be given the opportunity to present written statements listing objectionable materials which their children were not to use. However, the controversial D.C. Heath

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<sup>68</sup> October 31, 1974, The Gazette, “Splinter Group Report: Majority of Texts Rejected by Panel”

series was to be placed only in libraries and no additional copies of it were ever to be ordered. Only Alice Moore voted against the compromise. The following day, two thousand protesters held a rally at the Civic Center to plan future activities.

A week after the Board's decision, the Business and Professional People's Alliance for Better Textbooks purchased space in both Charleston papers to present "What Your Children Will Read" which was a lengthy list of excerpts taken out of context from a number of the disputed texts. The publication had a devastating effect. Those protesters who had never really read the books were even more adamant after seeing the lists and thousands of Kanawha County residents who had not been involved in the controversy found it shocking.

On November 22, 1974, there was a lull in textbook activity. Alice Moore proposed a set of guidelines to the Board and with some rewording, her guidelines were approved. These guidelines will be analyzed in detail in the third chapter.

Despite the adoption of Moore's guidelines, the first of December witnessed the detonation of a stick of dynamite outside of Mary Ingles Elementary School and a movement to secede the Upper Kanawha Valley from Kanawha County to form a new county.<sup>69</sup>

In mid-December, five officials were assaulted during a Board of Education meeting. The regular board meeting had come to a close and board members were preparing to hear informal reports when protesters from the audience moved to the front of the room and began striking board members and administrators. They appeared to

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<sup>69</sup> Goode, "A Study of Values," 134.

move on cue and the clash lasted only a minute and broke up when a woman in the audience sprayed mace at Underwood.<sup>70</sup>

Starting in mid-December, indictments began to be handed down and the majority of the violence ended. Three Cabin Creek men were indicted for conspiracy to bomb the Wet Branch Elementary School. The woman who sprayed mace at Underwood was arrested. Two men were arrested for illegally disposing of dynamite near two elementary schools. Notably, Marvin Horan blamed the Board of Education for the violence and for “destroying an entire generation of young people,” though a month later he was indicted as a conspirator in the bombings.<sup>71</sup>

Though the violence settled down and a sense of normalcy returned, the impact of controversy on the county’s sense of community and its perception of public education was altered permanently. To gain a better sense of the nuanced motivations behind such protest and violence, the variety of protest voices are examined in the following chapter.

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<sup>70</sup> December 13, 1974, The Charleston Gazette, “Five Officials Assaulted During Board Meeting”

<sup>71</sup> Goode, “A Study of Values,” 136.



## Chapter Two: Community Voices

*“Wherever two or more groups within a state differ in religion, or in language and in nationality, the immediate concern of each group is to use the schools to preserve its own faith and tradition. For it is in the school that the child is drawn towards or drawn away from the religion and the patriotism of its parents.”<sup>72</sup>*

With only a summary of events highlighting the most important moments in the controversy, simply dividing the community between pro and anti-textbook factions is easy. For instance, one reporter described the controversy as, “a holy war between people who depend on books and people who depend on the Book.”<sup>73</sup>

However such a division oversimplifies the community’s objections and support of the textbooks as well as delegitimizes their motivations to act and speak out. In this chapter, utilizing a multitude of sources such as editorials, local newspapers, distributed pamphlets, printed objections, and recorded dialogue, a thorough sense of the variety of protest voices will be established and analyzed. These differing protesters are categorized by the uniting theme of their voices.

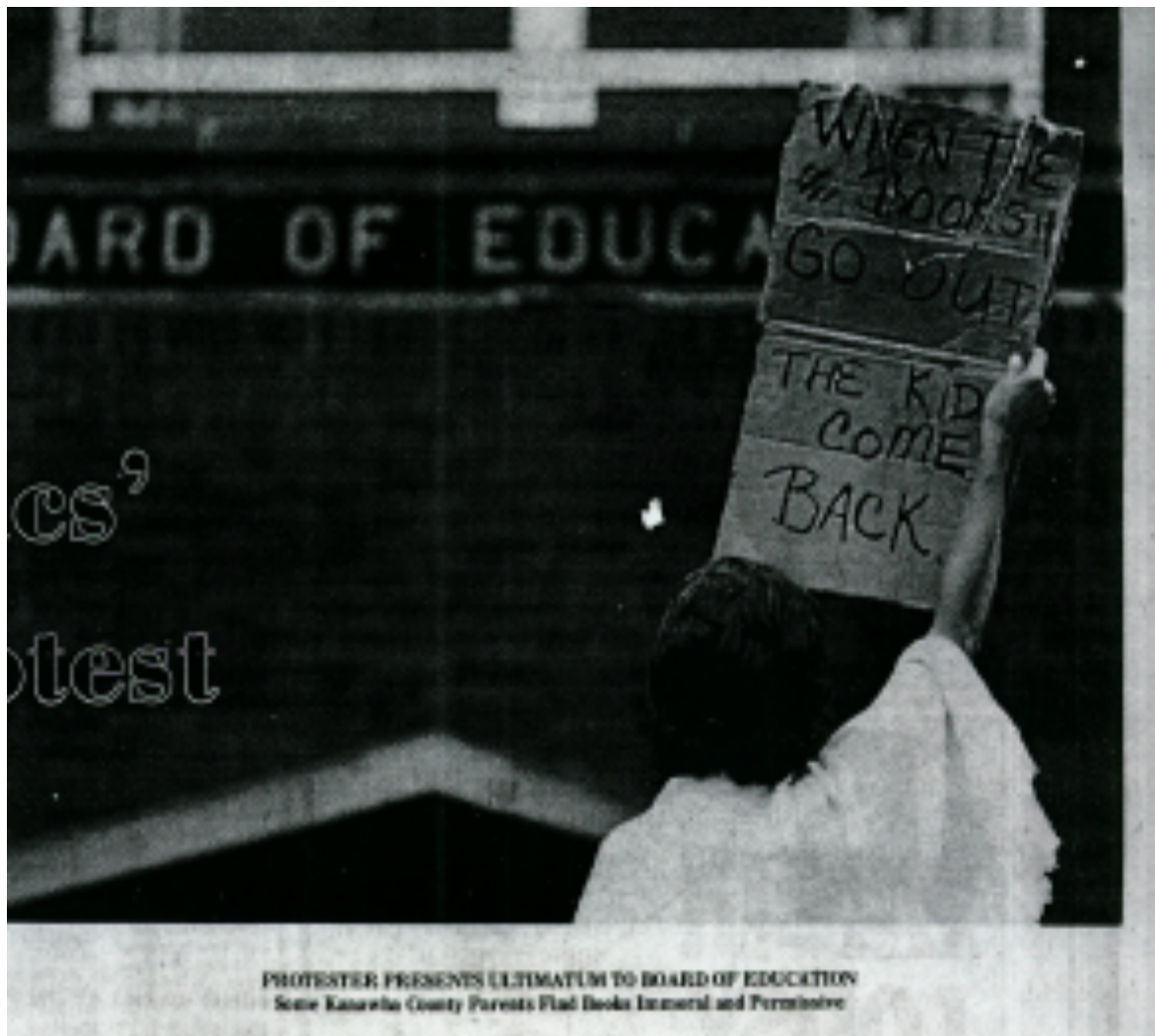
The ability of newly adopted language arts textbooks to spark such an explosive controversy reflects the impact of textbooks and more broadly, public education, on creating a sense of identity and belonging. Through objecting or supporting the textbooks and the language they contained, the citizens of Kanawha County were bitterly fighting to

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<sup>72</sup>Lippman, Walter. *“American Inquisitors: A Commentary on Dayton and Chicago,”* 23.

<sup>73</sup> Cowan, *“The Tribes of America,”* 77.

protect their own definitions of what it meant to be a good student, parent, teacher, community member, and American.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, through protesting and ultimately reworking the process of textbook adoption and inclusion, the citizens redefined who and what was included in their notion of a good public school education.



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<sup>74</sup> Mason, *Reading Appalachia*, 24.

<sup>75</sup> The Charleston Gazette, December 15, 1974.

### No or Yes to the Textbooks?

In mid-September of 1974 the protest was just beginning its violent stages.<sup>76</sup> The Charleston Gazette published results from a poll in which they asked voters, “How do you stand in the Kanawha County textbook controversy?” The data was received from September 16-24 and claimed to represent a cross-section of the county.<sup>77</sup> Out of the 386 voters asked, 41.2 per cent said no to the textbooks, 27.2 per cent said yes, and 31.6 per cent fell into the undecided or unconcerned category. These statistics are useful in garnering a sense of community opinion. Perhaps the most significant number is the percentage of voters that were either undecided or unconcerned. Given the early stage at which this question was asked, the power of either side to sway public opinion through multiple tactics was still fairly high.

When asked to explain why the voters felt the way that they did, those who opposed the textbooks stated the books were anti-religious, obscene and/or immoral, they hadn’t read the books but had heard bad things, the books were communistic, the books contained bad language and grammar, the books were unpatriotic and against law and order, they were against books but also against protesters, they were against some of the books, or they gave no reason.

When asked to explain why the voters favored the textbooks, a high percentage of the favoring respondents stated their faith in teachers and professionals, their belief that the books contained a good variety of views and were good educational material, they

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<sup>76</sup> Refer to the previous chapter for a timeline of the controversy.

<sup>77</sup> The fact that the newspaper only asked registered voters could be a level of bias against more rural, nonvoters but there was no official breakdown of registered voters by county lines available, so comment is merely speculation.

hadn't read but believed they're okay, they were against protesters, they believed there were worse things in the newspapers and TV, there were worse things heard on street corners, or the feeling that there was nothing wrong with the books.

Of those who responded that they were either undecided or unconcerned, most people stated that they had no children and therefore did not care, they hadn't read the books, they believed education should be left to the professionals, they didn't think children would be hurt with books in or out, they didn't like protesters and didn't like books, they believed some of the books were good and some were bad, and the greatest majority of the respondents did not give a reason beyond "I haven't made up my mind" or "I don't care."<sup>78</sup>

The groupings of the respondent's reasons for protesting or supporting the textbooks loosely mirror the thematic divides explored within this chapter. The numbers provided from the survey above help to establish some understanding of quantitative representations of the protest, for both sides of the conflict claimed to speak for the majority. Unfortunately, continued polling data could not be located for the remainder of the conflict.

### The Board of Education's Perceived Role

Close analysis of a number of Board of Education documents reveals the perceived role and involvement of the board and the public in making textbook decisions. The documents clearly prioritize the role of professional educators in making textbook

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<sup>78</sup> Charleston Gazette, September 24, 1974, "More Appear to Oppose Controversial Textbooks"

decisions and allowing very little room for public comment. Firstly, such protocol was aligned with the State Board of Education's mandates in regards to textbook adoption. Secondly, the lack of public inclusion reflects commonly held notions of the value of professional decision making. The next chapter will importantly look at how such guidelines were abandoned and remodeled following the controversy.

The first Board of Education document, "A Policy Statement of the Kanawha County Board of Education" from May 1974, explicitly details the beliefs of the Board of Education in regards to the perceived role of various community actors in curriculum development and textbook adoption.

Regarding the role of the superintendent, the document states that the superintendent is, among other tasks, to "regularly seek revision of school law to coincide with changing curriculum and new insights in learning." Inclusion of this responsibility reflects the Board's belief that education is a developing entity.

The role of the Textbook Selection Committee includes the "ultimate responsibility for evaluation, selection, and recommendation of all textbooks..." Committee members included classroom teachers and principals, "whose competence qualifies them to make the important recommendations." This statement reflects the trust of the Board in the quality and morality of the county's educators. Many of those opposed to the textbooks did not have such trust in teachers and principals, especially when issues of morality were in question.

The only mention of public inclusion in the process is on the last page. The document states the Board's responsibility to the public is displaying the recommended textbooks in an accessible location for viewing. Though many of the Board and

committee members were parents, the lack of public parental engagement and recognition in this process reflects a differing perception of who was responsible for shaping public education. These differing notions greatly contributed to the controversy.<sup>79</sup>

The second Board of Education document, “An Overview of the Kanawha County Schools Language Arts Adoption”, details the Board’s philosophies and procedures regarding language arts. This source is valuable in answering the questions of the Board’s perception of the purpose of the language arts course and the public school system at large. When analyzing this source it is important to consider firstly, how reflective of the community these beliefs and philosophies were and secondly, how well articulated these philosophies were to the public.

The document first details the exhaustive work of the five member Language Arts Textbook Committee and the twenty member Curriculum Study Committee in making their adoption recommendations. Opening the document with quantitative details of their work was perhaps the Board’s attempt to establish credibility, subject area expertise, and public trust in the accuracy of their recommendations.

The Board’s articulation of the purpose of the language arts programs thoroughly reflects their perception of the role of education in a child’s life. Consistent with the national shift towards the “values clarification” pedagogy, the Kanawha Board of Education believed in the need to enable the student to make better decisions amongst conflicting world views. In regards to language arts, the Board recognized the necessity of the subject to adjust with society and reflect the many views of a “multi-opinioned society.” In addition, the Board celebrated language arts as a “unique decision-making

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<sup>79</sup> “A Policy Statement of the Kanawha County Board of Education,” May 1974.

opportunity” for students. The subject presents varying viewpoints which allow the student to broaden their knowledge of life views. The Board clearly stated that the students have the right to, “maintain any personal views he holds of the world and mankind.” Importantly this statement portrays the Board’s intention of positively influencing rather than indoctrinating or scandalizing their pupils.

The Board refuted numerous criticisms of the recommendations, clearly pitting themselves against the anti-textbook faction of the community. The Board consistently recognized the need for education to expand students’ worldviews and accurately represent the voices and beliefs of the country. In addition, the Board openly acknowledged that the opinions and beliefs espoused were not always “sterile...and not always majority opinion.” Immediately after that statement however, the Board claimed that, “school system Language Arts Programs are not, by any stretch of the imagination, anything but conservative.” The Board also stated that they “do not really stray much to the right or left of center America.” These claims reflect a fundamental difference in perception of the term “conservative” amongst the Board of Education and the anti-textbook protestors. As clearly espoused by the Board, they believed their recommendations for supplementary texts were necessary in enriching students’ education while still remaining consistent with traditional American beliefs. Clearly, evinced by the backlash the textbooks caused and examined later in this chapter, the anti-textbook protestors’ definition of such beliefs varied greatly.<sup>80</sup>

The third Board of Education source, “Division of Planning, Research, Evaluation, and Renewal, Form for Evaluating a Textbook”, provides a sample of the

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<sup>80</sup> “An Overview of the Kanawha County Schools Language Arts Adoption,” May 1974.

evaluation form for textbooks. The form is from 1973, a year before the textbook controversy, and can be viewed in the index. Though the form is blank, the document provides a sense of what evaluators were looking for and perhaps how they deemed textbooks controversial. In Section VI, titled “Meaningfulness of Content”, the form provides the space to evaluate the “function” of the book. Evaluators were able to choose from the options, 1. Relates to Daily Experiences, 2. Provides for Individual Differences, 3. Provides for Discovery, or 4. Provides for Strong Vocabulary Development. These options reflect the perceived utility, amongst Board members, of presenting conflict and prompting self-discovery.<sup>81</sup>

In Part II, “Continuous Progress Education”, the form asks “Does the textbook lend itself to individualized instruction?” Section X asks “Does this approach have diversity in the approach to the teaching of instructional skills?” and Section XII asks, “Does the book lend itself to student-centered “inquiry” approach?”<sup>82</sup> These evaluating questions aptly reflect the established values clarification theory. In addition they reflect the county’s necessity of abiding by the parameters of the State, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Analyzing the Board of Education documents provides a thorough understanding of the Board’s philosophies regarding language arts and textbook adoption. Furthermore the sources establish their beliefs about who should make decisions regarding textbook adoptions and curriculum development, clearly limiting open public involvement. With

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<sup>81</sup> “Division of Planning, Research, Evaluation, and Renewal, Form for Evaluating a Textbook,” 6.

<sup>82</sup> “Division of Planning, Research, Evaluation, and Renewal, Form for Evaluating a Textbook,” 8.



the months following May, the Board's firm commitment to the guidelines above splintered and changed under the weight of public pressure and protest.

Statements from Dr. Kenneth Underwood, county superintendent from 1971 to 1974, further illuminate growing divisions between the public education system and the community. Within a video segment from the school board archives, undated but presumably from the end of the 1974 summer given its location within the tape, Underwood appears disheveled and frustrated. He states that he and the board are more than happy to talk to concerned parents but, "[we] cannot talk to anyone when a mob is ruling." Citing the circulation of a significant amount of misinformation about the textbooks, he states that, "people talking without reason is ridiculous." The segment concludes with Underwood stating, "I've never been anywhere in my life where I have seen fear run as rampant as it is right here, right now. This is one of the most ridiculous things I've ever seen in my life."<sup>83</sup> His repeated claim that the controversy is ridiculous sent a strong dismissal of legitimacy of the protesters. Though he stated he was willing to speak with concerned parents, his dismissal of legitimacy from the very beginning of the controversy was a strong indicator of the growing distance in understanding between the multiple factions.

### First Objection: Deterioration of Standards

The first objection to the textbooks was brought forth by school board member Alice Moore. At a regularly sleepy school board meeting Moore surprised her colleagues with the accusation that the textbooks lowered standards by teaching poor grammar in the

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<sup>83</sup> West Virginia State Archives, School Board recordings, C74-1494.

form of dialectology.<sup>84</sup> She saw the teaching of dialect as undermining “standard American speech.” Though she did not attempt to provide her definition for what constituted standard American speech, this sentiment is very much in line with the back to basics crusade discussed in the first chapter.

Moore also announced that the NAACP opposed the use of dialectology because, “it encouraged the use of black vernacular – or “ghetto dialect.” She stated openly that the result of using textbooks that teach dialectology is that “middle-class students would learn to speak in ghetto dialect.”<sup>85</sup> This statement, in defense of upholding standards, is charged with both racial and class tensions that will be analyzed later in the chapter.

To counter Moore’s assertion that studying other dialects lowered standards, a local teacher stated that examining other dialects helped “West Virginians not only to use what is called the standard dialect but also to respect themselves and the speech of their parents, their grandparents, to learn that they need not be ashamed of being Appalachians and sounding like Appalachians, and to know the difference between regional dialect and incorrect language.”<sup>86</sup>

Though the objections on the grounds of dialectology were quickly abandoned and consumed by other related objections such as race, Alice Moore’s initial objection significantly reflected her desire to preserve “standard” language and exclude any mention of those falling beyond her limited definition. In addition, the potential of language arts to instill regional pride or shame is important.

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<sup>84</sup> Dialectology is the scientific study of linguistic dialect, a sub-field of sociolinguistics. It studies variations in language based primarily on geographic distribution and their associated features.

<sup>85</sup> Carol Mason’s interview with Alice Moore, 6.

<sup>86</sup> Mason, *Reading Appalachia*, 22.

This research strives to better elucidate voices that are not commonly explored within this controversy, however it is impossible not to briefly mention some background on Alice Moore given her indisputable significance in igniting this controversy.

Alice Moore, or “Sweet Alice”, was beautiful, calm, and well-spoken. A relative newcomer prior to the controversy, Moore campaigned against sexual education and won a seat on the school board in 1970. With a sweet, southern drawl she surprised the four other male board members with her assertiveness and passion.<sup>87</sup> In archival footage, simply marked “Alice Moore Being Charming,” she is seen laughing and smiling with her colleagues.<sup>88</sup> However other footage reveals her ability to command a room and please a crowd. Reflecting on the controversy, one resident stated that “Moore can take direct credit for the controversy...she must have touched something that so many of our people felt.”<sup>89</sup>

### The Complexities of Racially Charged Objections

The issue of race within this controversy is deeply intertwined with other local and national complexities regarding shifting cultural perceptions of race. The 1960s ushered in new successes of the Civil Rights movement with the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>90</sup> Despite improved legislation, the integration of society was and

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<sup>87</sup> Nell Woods, the chair of the textbook selection committee, stated that, “Moore served on a board with four men who were southern gentleman, people who found it very difficult to look a beautiful woman in the eye and say, you’re a liar, you are manipulative, even when they knew that.” (Mason, *Reading Appalachia*, 94)

<sup>88</sup> Archival tapes: C74-1784

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Priscilla Haden, May 21, 2015

<sup>90</sup> <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/johnson-signs-civil-rights-act>

still is far from seamless. Within the confines of this research, the seemingly subtle and overt racially charged objections will be analyzed as a contributing voice of protest.

Though some community members viewed the adoption of a multiethnic curriculum as a “logical extension of desegregation,” others objected to the inclusion of authors they felt morally degraded students.<sup>91</sup> The most well-known objection was the inclusion of works by Eldridge Cleaver, the African American author of the 1968 bestselling prison memoir *Soul on Ice*. Though *Soul on Ice* was placed only on the supplemental reading list for advanced placement, college-bound high school students, many citizens felt that its inclusion anywhere in the schools was utterly unacceptable. As one community member stated, “I object to any works of Eldridge Cleaver’s being printed in any textbook because he is not worth admiration as a writer or as anything else.”<sup>92</sup>

To counter such claims that minorities should not be represented with the “Eldridge Cleavers and the George Jacksons”, a teacher at a Board of Education meeting stated that such authors “have a message from the other side of the American experience that ought to be told.”<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, an African American teacher in Kanawha County stated that there are many respectable black authors within the rejected textbooks such as Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, but “perhaps you just don’t recognize their names since they haven’t been in the curriculum before.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Mason, *Reading Appalachia*, 20.

<sup>92</sup> The Charleston Gazette, November 5, 1974, “Excerpts from Objections”

<sup>93</sup> Mason, *Reading Appalachia*, 22.

<sup>94</sup> Mason, *Reading Appalachia*, 22.

Some in the community denied claims that the textbook controversy was a sign of intolerance, stating the West Virginians had a long history of inclusion.<sup>95</sup> However others expressed their sadness that the controversy shed light on the existing prejudice in the community.<sup>96</sup>

More overtly, one protest pamphlet circulated throughout the community, titled “A Message to All True Sons of Appalachia”, reflected white superiority sentiments. The pamphlet spends four pages discussing the importance of the white heritage of various religious leaders as well discusses the hardships of their fathers as Christians in Appalachia. Though there are numerous themes of the pamphlet, such as the purity of religion and the resilience of mountaineers, the dominant tone is one that aggressively defines the “true sons of Appalachia” and the “sons of the hills” as white. Within their description there is certainly no room to include multiethnic textbooks that would undermine the notions of white dominance.<sup>97</sup>

### The Power of Religion

According to a poll taken in November of 1974 by the Charleston Gazette, 95 per cent of Kanawha County residents stated that they were a firm believer in God. When asked if the Bible should be interpreted exactly as it is written, 66 per cent said yes.<sup>98</sup> The

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<sup>95</sup> Daily Mail, September 16, 1974, “Argument Over Textbooks Not Sign of Intolerance”

<sup>96</sup> Daily Mail, September 9, 1974, “Prejudices Surfacing”

<sup>97</sup> Beyond the scope of this research is the KKK’s involvement within the controversy. While local newspapers reflected a lack of concern and stated the limited impact of the KKK within the controversy, other historians cite the KKK’s role as significant.

<sup>98</sup> The Charleston Gazette, November 10, 1974, “95 Per cent in Kanawha Claim Belief in God”

history of religion in Appalachia is rich and complex.<sup>99</sup> Many of the residents of Kanawha County “cling to the fundamentalist Christian concepts of their heritage.”<sup>100</sup> A local resident stated that, “Religion became fatalistic and stressed rewards in another life due to the hard life of the mountains.” Appalachian religion is based on “the belief in the original sin, that man is fallible, that he will fail and does fail.”<sup>101</sup> Of course, such a statement does not speak for all residents of the county but is reflective of commonly held notions.

Many residents objected to the textbooks on the grounds of religion, believing the texts to promote sacrilegious and anti-Christian ideals. Such objections include taking the Lord’s name in vain, deeming statements such as “There is no God like one’s throat...” sacrilegious, believing books by authors such as John Updike questioned the authenticity of and poke fun at the Bible, and that some texts presupposed that the Bible was based on a myth.<sup>102</sup>

Another commonly articulated religious objection was the belief that the new textbooks promoted “secular humanism.”<sup>103</sup> Many in the county espoused concerns that the new textbooks were proof that the schools wanted to create a humanistic, secular

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<sup>99</sup> For a thorough history of religion in the Appalachian region, refer to *The United States of Appalachia* by Jeff Biggers.

<sup>100</sup> Goode, “A Study in Values,” 98.

<sup>101</sup> Betty P. Crickard, “Cultural Values Influencing Educational Programming in West Virginia”, Second Annual Mountain Heritage In-Service Training Workshop, November 1974, West Virginia State Department of Education, West Virginia University Extension Service

<sup>102</sup> The Charleston Gazette, November 5, 1974, “Excerpts from Objections”

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

society without Christianity.<sup>104</sup> Reacting to larger concerns about the recently mandated removal of school prayer, many protesters feared that secular humanism would replace Christianity in their children's minds. Parents were particularly concerned about the promotion of situation ethics in classrooms that did not teach Christian absolutes but instead taught "judgment-free" secularism.<sup>105</sup> How would their children learn right from wrong if not for the lessons of the Bible?

Religious leaders in the community actively organized their congregations in protest, as detailed in the first chapter. The first source is an Open Letter addressed to the superintendent, Dr. Kenneth Underwood, and members of the Board of Education, from the Nazarene Area Ministerial Association, dated September 9, 1974. The letter stated that the Church of the Nazarene had always, "sought to encourage good citizenship among its members." The church sought to separate themselves from the protests and "mud-slinging campaign" but also to publicly proclaim their objection to the books. This statement reflected the church's perception that good citizenship involves voicing beliefs without aggressive action. Such beliefs were certainly not shared by all of the religious protesters.

The letter continued on to state that the church was opposed to the use of the textbooks and believed that the, "majority DOES NOT want the textbooks and tapes." Most reflective of the church's beliefs is the statement, "The best education possible in a classroom that does not tamper with ideals and convictions which are personal to each

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<sup>104</sup> Mason, *Reading Appalachia*, 109.

<sup>105</sup> For a methodical analysis of all the letters to the editor of Charleston newspapers refer to religious studies professor Clayton L. McNearney's, "The Kanawha County Textbook Controversy", October 1975.

individual child and parent.” The church’s definition of the “best education possible” did not greatly differ from the beliefs in education espoused by the Board of Education. As noted in the first section, the Board of Education believed in an education that allowed children to maintain their personal beliefs while being presented with multiple world views. The church claimed to believe in a similar education; however it appears not to have accepted the ability of a student to maintain such beliefs while confronted with conflicting views.

The second pamphlet is a “NOTICE” from the Church of Jesus Christ of Charleston, West Virginia published in the Charleston Gazette. The date of the notice is unknown. The notice was written by Pastor Lewis Harrah, an active member of the anti-textbook protestors. The pastor espouses his beliefs against obscene literature that undermines God, profanity, anti-Patriotic sentiments, and the questioning of parental authority.

After listing their beliefs, the pastor instructed church and community members to not read or study the textbooks in question. He stated that doing so would “not be keeping in the standards of good Christian conduct...and would be considered an offense against God and the Church.” Furthermore, the pastor stated that the Church must do everything in its power, within the law, to see the textbooks removed, “...knowing that we cannot attend school as long as the books are there, if it means forever.” Such statements reflect the passionate fervor of some of protestors. To threaten members with offending God and the Church over supplementary textbooks would have been a very weighty threat in such a religious community.

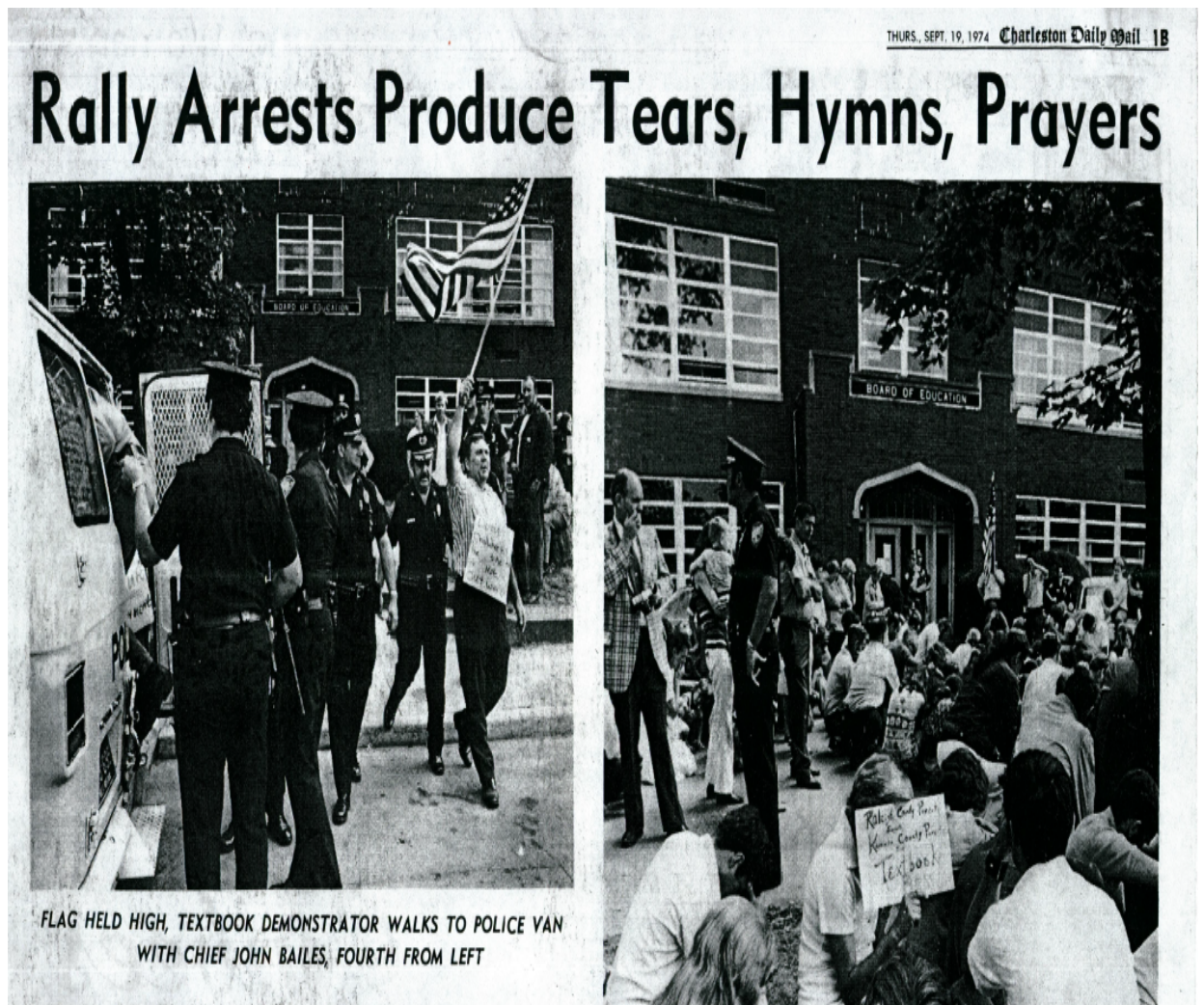


The objections and protest pamphlets reflect the perceived power of the textbooks in altering community beliefs and identities regarding religion. Furthermore they reflect the fear of parental usurpation in the moral guidance of a child's life. Parents previously felt confident that the content of classrooms and textbooks did not differ from their own teachings at home or in Church. Despite the fact that many of the protesters had not read the new textbooks, they feared the inculcation of secular views and the distancing between their religious identity and their child's. Lastly, their objections and threats to never return to public schools reflect the strongly held desire that parents and religious leaders should be consulted and respected in the adoption of textbooks, and that public schooling should still have some place for religion within its teachings.

Few accounts were found of children's discussion of religion. One taped interview however shows children at a newly founded Christian school during the controversy. The children appear happy and giddy to be videotaped. When asked if they like going to the new school, all responded positively and all mentioned that they liked that, "they can't put the books in here." One girl assertively responded that her new school is better because "we don't have to learn those filthy books."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> From archival Tapes C74-1871



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## Strict Definitions of Patriotism

Another important facet of the controversy is the faction of the protesters who viewed the textbooks as anti-American. This theme was most dominant in the objections published in the Charleston Gazette. Objections include statements such as, “Most Americans would object to having George Bernard Shaw grouped with patriotic Americans such as Benjamin Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt.” Another person

<sup>107</sup> The Charleston Daily Mail, September 19, 1974.

objected to the statement that, “Liberty, just the word by itself, means nothing,” as un-American. Objections were made to the discussion of socialism because it was deemed un-American to express approval of another system of government other than democracy. Other objections include objections to “questioning patriotism where there should be absolute answers,” and an objection stating that “asking for political opinions in English classrooms is NOT needed.” Another salient objection was to literature deemed to be making fun of, “democracy, Sears Roebuck, and Roosevelt.”<sup>108</sup>

Out of this fear of spreading unpatriotic rhetoric, both moderate and extreme factions of the protest grew. Leading the moderate segment was Elmer Fike, the president of Fike Chemical Inc. Fike published columns and essays about the controversy. He established the group to provide a forum for “the moderate sector of the community that is distressed over current educational trends.” Among their founding beliefs, Fike states that, “We believe that these books do not promote, in fact, are an attack on, the American system that has made this country the envy of the world.”<sup>109</sup> Among many statements, Fike notably believes that this controversy put, “The preservation of the American school, perhaps the whole American system, at stake.”<sup>110</sup>

These more moderate objections are vital in examining the perceived influence of textbooks on notions of what it means to be an American. As the objections and founding principles above indicate, it is apparently un-American to question the government, speak in anything other than praises of founding fathers, or question patriotism, pride, or successful department stores. Despite commonly held American values of freedom of

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<sup>108</sup> The Charleston Gazette, September 1974.

<sup>109</sup> Charleston Gazette, October 14, 1974, “New Anti-text Group Forms”

<sup>110</sup> Textbook Controversy in Perspective and Other Related Essay, by Elmer Fike.

expression and speech, this faction of the protestors firmly believed in dismissing any textbooks that would cause children to question their limited definition of American.

Another element of the patriotism voices was the more extreme faction. A pamphlet titled “Textbook Protest in W.Va.” by Dr. Joseph Sheppe claimed to tell readers what the textbook controversy is really about. “The Huntington and Charleston newspapers would have you believe that a bunch of extremists are embarrassing the county and state and the educational intelligentsia. Let’s take a look at the truth.”

The pamphlet states that the “LIBERAL ESTABLISHMENT” is converting the “great American Republic into a helpless branch of their One World Socialist society.” The pamphlet then lists twelve supposed steps of a “paid leader promoting destruction.”

Though the pamphlet represents a more extreme espousal of paranoid plots, many of the themes are very much consistent with the more general objections. The first step reflects the broader fear of parent’s losing control to the government over their children’s education and morality. The fifth step reflects the fear of rebellion and the generational gap amongst children and parents. The tenth step denounces profanity and finally the eleventh step reflects the fear in the breakdown of traditional social norms.<sup>111</sup> This source clings to the definition of America as a strong, conservative power and rejects any text that questions such a definition.

### Exposing versus Protecting

At the crux of the textbook controversy are the conflicting notions of what a child should be exposed to in the classroom, away from his or her parent. Countless statements

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<sup>111</sup> “Textbook Protest in W.Va.” pamphlet.

throughout the controversy reflected either fear or celebration of presenting complex worldviews in school.

Within this debate, the importance of symbolically charged language must be recognized. Those in favor of exposing children to the complexities of the world referred to them as “students”. The idea of individual learners represented in the term students was important for arguing for classroom rights. On the contrary, those opposed to the books utilized the terminology of “our children”. Connotations of growth, of future, and of promise are embedded in the idea of progeny rather than the idea of learners. Throughout history, representations of children help to “reorient people’s identities, histories, and worlds.”<sup>112</sup>

Many citizens objected to the textbooks for exposing children to various elements of the world deemed profane and unfit for “our children.” Some rejected an excerpt describing a house fire because of “excessive violence.” Quotes from the Rolling Stone were protested because the magazine was deemed in “poor taste with radical views.” Parents took issue with an essay titled “Grief” because it was said to be, “a depressing morbid preoccupation with despair.” Other objections included invading student privacy by “drawing out student’s personal experience.”<sup>113</sup>

Editorials from parents further reflected the desire to protect children from anything deemed “disturbing.” “Let it be known that the almighty dollar doesn’t give them the right to teach your children crud that they can learn on the street corners,” stated

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<sup>112</sup> Mason, *Reading Appalachia*, 163.

<sup>113</sup> Charleston Gazette, Objections.

one parent.<sup>114</sup> Teachers joined to oppose what they felt were too much violence in the textbooks and claimed that there was surely a better way to help children cope with the future than presenting violence, killing, and despair. One teachers commented that, “The elementary textbooks are not obscene but they are very depressing and contain too much violence. They have nothing inspirational or uplifting and children need beautiful literature to bring them out of this age of despair.”<sup>115</sup>

Pamphlets such as “Facts about Sex for Today’s Youth” further concerned parents about what their children were being exposed to. The image on the pamphlet features photos of condoms and male genitals. In addition the photo was accompanied by the statement that, “Sexual intercourse takes place when a man places his enlarged (erect) penis into the vagina of a woman.” It went on to explain, “Some “street” words for vagina are “box,” “snatch,” “cunt,” “hole,” “pussy.” It is not polite to use any of these expressions. However since they are sometimes used, there is no need to be embarrassed by not knowing what they mean.” Though the information shown in the pamphlet was not for elementary students and placed in a library for informational use, parents were outraged with blatant references to sex and genitals.

On the supporting side, students, parents, and teachers believed that the new textbooks provided a “true education.” Teachers felt that English had never been so challenging and one claimed that she wished she had been exposed to such things when growing up. Another teacher stated that she felt that “children have to learn to think and draw conclusions from what they read. These stories give them something to think about

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<sup>114</sup> The Gazette, September 12, 1974, “They’re Our Schools”

<sup>115</sup> The Charleston Gazette, October 20, 1974

and discuss. The teachers gave guided children in discussion for years and are still capable of doing this.”<sup>116</sup> Parents defined good books as any book that “deepens the students’ appreciation of good literature and broadens their understanding of persons whose backgrounds may differ from their own.”<sup>117</sup>

Numerous pamphlets were created by the Kanawha Coalition for Quality Education, a prominent pro-textbook organization in the county. One pamphlet published in the Daily Mail newspaper on September 18, 1974, clearly states the coalition’s defense of the proposed textbooks and their belief in the purpose of public education to adequately prepare students for a diverse world. The pamphlet also defends the quality and integrity of the county’s educators. Another pamphlet claimed to present the truth about the textbooks by providing numerous excerpts. These sources importantly establish the pro-textbook faction’s beliefs in the role of public education and their definition of a “responsible, quality” education as one that presents complexities to students. Seemingly, by proclaiming their belief in the necessity of providing exposure to a “variety of opinions, ideas, and cultures” they are defining their opposition’s beliefs as seeking to limit student exposure to only perceived traditional American beliefs.

Central to this debate is the amount of trust between all sides of the controversy. Do professional educators trust parents to make decisions about textbooks? As articulated above through the analysis of Board of Education documents, no. Do parents trust teachers to imbue moral lessons within their children? Do teachers trust the community to

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<sup>116</sup> The Charleston Gazette, October 20, 1974

<sup>117</sup> The Charleston Gazette, September 14, 1974 “Good Books”

allow them academic freedom and integrity in the classroom? Do parents trust students to correctly choose their moral paths when presented with complexities?

Some parents passionately defended their trust in the county's teachers. "I trust my children to the teachers, who are parents themselves. I'm sure that as parents they wouldn't teach my children anything that they wouldn't teach their own. And with this faith I will continue to stand proudly behind them offering my assistance until they or the books are proven unworthy for our children."<sup>118</sup>

Other parents had no faith in their teachers, especially to discuss open-ended questions about social dilemmas. Such lack of trust was caused by the small community's awareness of some teachers with personal and criminal records as well as better trained teachers residing in some parts of the community compared to other parts. Many community members felt insufficiently assured when asked to trust teachers based on their amount of education alone.<sup>119</sup>

Students chimed in. "If our parents have read and approved them, why can't we read the books we were given? For the first time in our lives we've been interested in English. Sadness came over us because we don't have the freedom to study like we want to."<sup>120</sup> Another student felt that, "Being a student, I expect to be given the opportunity to get an education. A true education can only come from seeing all sides of a concept and being given a chance to make a decision for oneself. Children brought up in arbors of sugar-spun candy surrounded with sunshine and purity are headed for a severe emotional

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<sup>118</sup> The Charleston Gazette, September 16, 1974

<sup>119</sup> Mason, *Reading Appalachia*, 22.

<sup>120</sup> The Charleston Gazette, September 18, 1974



upheaval when they encounter this world.”<sup>121</sup> Both students eloquently articulate their perceived rights as students. This defense of intellectual rights of students was further discussed as the National Education Association found that, “students have a right to have materials which are interesting, relevant, and stimulating.”<sup>122</sup> This theme will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

Rather than simply lump the community into pro and anti-textbook factions, it is important to understand and analyze the connected and disparate themes of the protest voices. Upon understanding the community’s breadth of objections and support for the textbooks it is only then possible to understand the impact of the controversy on community notions of the role of public education.

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<sup>121</sup> The Charleston Gazette, September 25, 1974

<sup>122</sup> Daily Mail, December 10, 1974, “Text Issue Said Attack on Intellectual Freedom”

### Chapter Three: Impact

*“We pretend we can do everything in one school...Society in general may have come to a point where we can't have a general school anymore.”<sup>123</sup>*

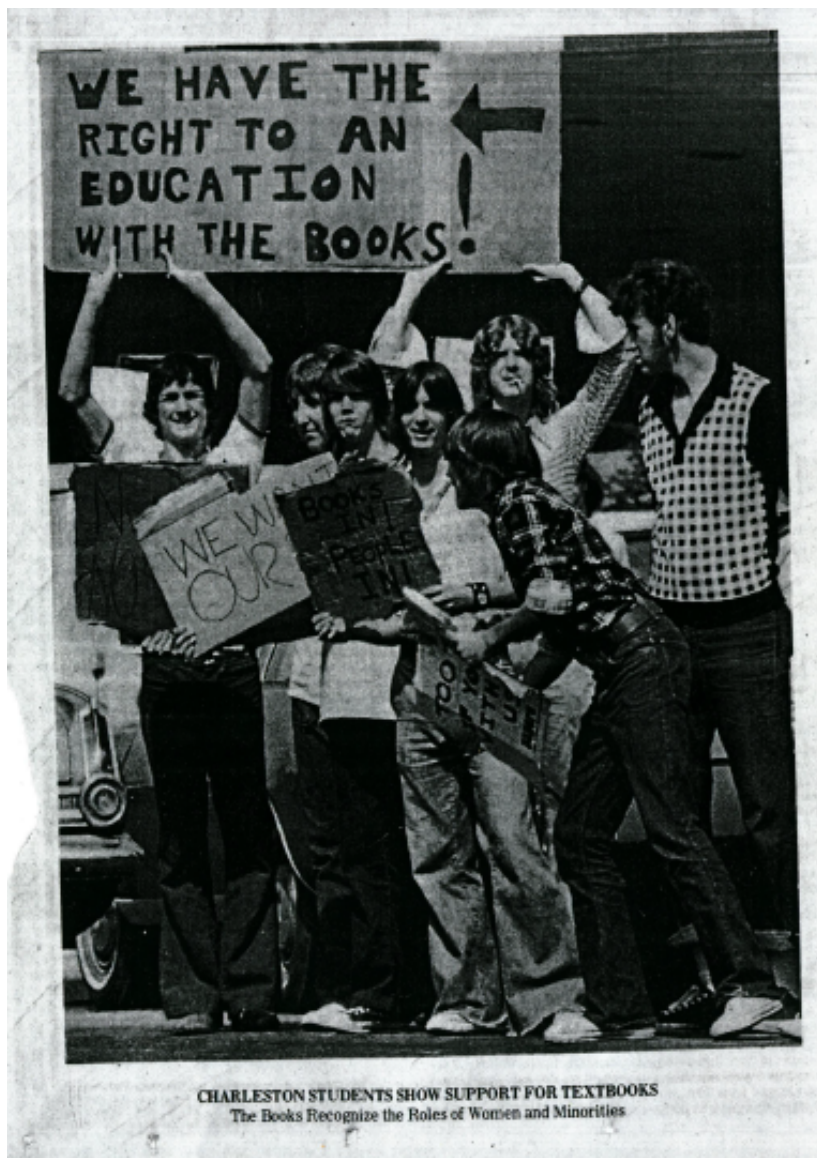
#### Immediate Attendance Impact

The textbook controversy directly impacted public school enrollment and private school expansion in Kanawha County after 1974. Six new private schools were opened in 1975, including new Christian schools that attracted nearly two thousand students. Following the controversy, the county's private schools totaled to twenty, as enrollment in public schools dropped by about 5,000 students.<sup>124</sup> Such increased privatization of education was directly blamed on parental disapproval of the controversial textbooks.

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<sup>123</sup> April 25, 1975, The Daily Mail.

<sup>124</sup> September 23, 1979, The Daily Mail.



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### Student Voices

The students who remained in the public schools however, had a range of opinions about the textbooks. Though they were the direct recipients and users of the textbooks in question, students were initially left out of the debates and decision making

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<sup>125</sup> December 15, 1974, The Charleston Gazette.

processes. Their preliminary lack of inclusion is unsurprising and consistent with the widespread belief that adults know better when it comes to controversial issues.

Some students however refused to be left out of the action. Led by their student body president, Charlie Loeb, the 1,200 students of George Washington High School staged a dramatic walkout in September of 1974 in response to the anti-book protests and removal of the textbooks. According to Loeb, “we were not going to go back into the schools until the textbooks were returned.” He believed that the proposed books tried to present the world in its complex reality. Loeb was angered and saddened witnessing the removal of such books. Loeb felt a deep sense of disappointment with the increased censorship and parental control of textbooks. In Loeb’s mind the controversy was between “people who viewed public education as a mechanism to insert information into people’s minds versus people who viewed public education as a mechanism to teach students how to think critically.”<sup>126</sup>

Loeb and his classmates eventually returned to school amidst the controversy. A few weeks later, Loeb was among the few high school students elected to the textbook committee. The election of students was a direct result of their walkout and protest. Although he initially felt threatened to speak out and voice his opinions amongst such passionate, and often violent, adult protesters, Loeb believed that his presence was valued on the committee. Ultimately though, Loeb was dismayed by the “watered-down” versions of the textbooks that were adopted and the accompanying guidelines.

At the start of the 1975 school year, students were asked “What is your advice to persons who disrupted school last year because of the textbook controversy?” Student

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<sup>126</sup> Personal Interview with Charlie Loeb, May 2015.

answers somewhat ranged and reflected varying perceptions of the role of community actors and the rights of students.

Some students felt that textbook decisions should be handled solely by the Board of Education and teachers and parents should not be a part of the equation. Other students felt that if people want to read the textbooks they should be allowed because, “everyone has the right to his own beliefs.” Lastly, students felt that only parents were objecting and they were allowed to voice their views but students should be allowed to read and use the textbooks.<sup>127</sup> Overall the student responses seemed to reflect a shared belief in a necessary distance between parents and educational decision making. This belief however would not be echoed in the new textbook selection guidelines.

### New Guidelines

In attempts to assuage parental concerns, new Board of Education guidelines and processes were enacted for future textbook selection. The anti-textbook faction blamed the committee for being “intellectually biased against parents.” They believed they knew better than professional educators what was best for their children. Furthermore, they felt that the committee promoted liberal books while, “excluding the views of a major section of society – conservatives.” Lastly, according to anti-textbook protesters, if parents really wanted their children to read the controversial books, they could always purchase the books to read at home.

Conversely, textbook supporters believed that the works rounded out and diversified a previously almost all-white curriculum. Introducing and discussing

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<sup>127</sup> September 8, 1975, The Daily Mail.

controversial issues was imperative to “stimulate the growth” of school children and help them to critically think about their community and world.

The new guidelines were adopted on November 21, 1974 amidst protests from the pro-textbook faction. The new textbook guidelines reflected many of the aforementioned objections and were seen as “near capitulation to the anti-textbook forces.”<sup>128</sup>

The guidelines stated that textbooks must distinguish the sanctity of the home and stress its importance as the basic unit of American society. Textbooks could not ask personal questions about students’ feelings or behavior, for fear of intruding on the privacy of students’ homes. Textbooks were not to encourage or promote racial hatred. Loyalty to the United States, an obligation to redress grievances through legal processes, and the key responsibilities of good citizens must be emphasized through textbooks. Textbooks must teach the “true history and heritage” of the United States and could not defame the nation’s founders or “misrepresent the ideals and causes for which they struggled and sacrificed.” Finally, textbooks must emphasize the traditional rules of grammar in the study of the English language.<sup>129</sup> All of the new guidelines directly appeal to the themes of protest discussed in the previous chapter.

The Board of Education guidelines from just six months before promoted a very different agenda.<sup>130</sup> Before the controversy, the Board passionately defended their philosophies about the importance of textbooks that presented controversies and a multitude of different values, views, opinions, and interpretations. They claimed that the

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<sup>128</sup>“A Textbook Study in Cultural Conflict: Kanahwa County, West Virginia. Inquiry Report.” National Education Association, Washington, D.C. Teacher Rights Division, February 19 75, 343.

<sup>129</sup>“A Textbook Study in Cultural Conflict”, 346.

<sup>130</sup> Outlined in greater depth in Chapter 2.

primary purpose of instruction was to “aid students to make decisions with which they can live...To make decisions of this type they must be exposed to some examples of interpersonal conflict...” The Board defended their intent to present textbooks that contained opinions, language, grammar and inflection of authors that did not abide by, “all of the conventional standards of beauty.”<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, the Board strongly stated their encouragement of including views that were not always “sterile...majority opinion...or representative of common consensus.” According to the Board in May of 1974, textbooks must show the students that America was not composed of people who hold one set of values, views, opinions, and interpretations, and encourage students to “open their eyes to the diversity of opinion that is typically American.”<sup>132</sup>

When compared to the previously outlined Board of Education textbook adoption philosophies and guidelines, the newly adopted guidelines of November reflected a great potential for limiting the textbooks permissible in public schools.

Many texts could be interpreted to deemphasize the sanctity of the home, for example any texts that included discussion of alternative ways of living or nontraditional relationships. Texts that prompted questions about personal feelings or behavior could be interpreted as any text that includes emotional or personal content. Discussions of slavery could be interpreted to promote racial hatred or to defame the nation’s founders. Learning about protest movements throughout history could undermine redressing grievances through legal processes. Strictly teaching loyalty to the United States through the “true

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<sup>131</sup> This statement refers to the Board’s defense of including sources that did not always abide by the standard rules of standard English i.e. slang and vernacular – a point of protest later in the conflict.

<sup>132</sup> State of West Virginia, “Department of Education”, 3-5.

history and heritage” is not only extremely subjective but could also be interpreted to leave out pivotal moments of controversy that are crucial to an accurate understanding of United States and world history, such as the Civil War or the Watergate scandal.<sup>133</sup> Lastly, only teaching the traditional rules of grammar excludes many great works of literature that utilized the vernacular or slang to increase a student’s understanding of a personal experience, such as “The Autobiography of Malcom X”.

The Board of Education’s abandonment of their convictions regarding the importance of presenting complex, controversial narratives reflects the strength of the anti-textbook protestors as well as the community’s perception and value of the role of parents and the public in controlling the content of public classrooms.

Newly adopted processes increased parental inclusion and scrutiny. A set of committees was appointed for each subject area. First, a preliminary curriculum committee, made up of five parents and a varying number of teachers, would meet for two or three days to develop a philosophy, rationale, objectives, and course outlines for each subject area. This committee then would submit a report of its work to the screening committee, which included the same five parents plus an additional ten more parents and five teachers. The screening committee, which was comprised of 75% parents, screened the textbooks according to the list of guidelines created by the Board of Education. For elementary level textbooks, the State Board of Education supplied the list of textbooks. Secondary level books were garnered directly from publishers. After testing the textbooks for compliance with the guidelines, the selection committee would then begin its work. According to West Virginia state law, the selection committee was made up of five

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<sup>133</sup> “A Textbook Study in Cultural Conflict”, 343.



professionals (either teachers or principals) approved by the Board. Finally, after the textbooks were presented to the Board, they were displayed for public viewing in libraries throughout the county. The public could comment on the books for about a month and the comments were then reported to the Board before final voting and adoption.<sup>134</sup> In 1979, utilizing the new guidelines and procedures, new English textbooks went through five separate screenings before reaching the Board of Education for deliberation.<sup>135</sup>

### Parental Inclusion

The most significant change to the textbook adoption procedures was the committee membership. Prior to the controversy, the committees consisted of “practicing, professionally trained and certified classroom teachers and administrators,” who were, “experts in the subject fields recommended for adoption.”<sup>136</sup> The only inclusion of the public was the county displays and public comment period before the final deliberation and adoption by the Board. In May of 1974, the Board of Education confidently stated that decisions regarding developing instructional programs and selection content for a school system were “obviously” best made by elected representatives on the Board of Education. Furthermore, the Board espoused its belief that the content and quality of instructional materials and programs is best judged by professionally trained educators.<sup>137</sup> The procedures and guidelines approved in November of 1974 greatly departed from the

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<sup>134</sup> February 11, 1977, The Daily Mail.

<sup>135</sup> September 23, 1979, The Daily Mail.

<sup>136</sup> State of West Virginia, “Department of Education”, 4.

<sup>137</sup> State of West Virginia, “Department of Education”, 5.

reliance and sole trust professional educators' opinions to include a greatly expanded role of parental judgment.

Two years after the adoption of such guidelines, the controversial textbooks were removed and parental participation in the selection process increased. According to the superintendent of Kanawha County public schools in 1977, Robert Kittle, "The texts have changed about 75 percent in the content of literature...they have been cleaned up." The cleaned up textbooks did not include any profanity, street language, or references to crime as the controversial textbooks purportedly contained. "The new textbooks took most of the villains out. The literature reflects more heroes than villains." In addition, the textbooks contained more respect for authority, law enforcement, and the government.<sup>138</sup> The villains that Kittle referred to are unclear, as the list of controversial and eventually removed textbooks included diverse and complex works from a range of authors. Assumedly Kittle simply meant that by including more heroes than villains, the textbooks returned to the comfortable simplicities of the "back to basics" crusade that did not question longstanding tropes. In addition, Alice Moore was reelected to her position on the Board of Education by a landslide.

The newfound parental engagement was believed by some to be a positive result of the controversy. With increased participation, future controversies would most likely be avoided. Kittle, stated that parents' viewpoints were "very valuable because they look[ed] at books differently from teachers."<sup>139</sup> A local teacher echoed the sentiment and praised the new selection process for allowing parents to see books from teachers'

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<sup>138</sup> September 23, 1979, The Daily Mail.

<sup>139</sup> February 2, 1977, The Daily Mail.

perspectives and teachers to see books from parents' perspectives.<sup>140</sup> According to others however, the proliferation of committees involving parents and the expansion of their role in the selection process allowed parents to act as censors rather than advisors.<sup>141</sup> The increased role and authority given to parents caused some community members to fear that the Board's responsibility to maintain control of the schools would be jeopardized and with it, "the atmosphere of free inquiry and the free exchange of ideas without which education cannot survive."<sup>142</sup>

A balance between parental concern and professional educators' expertise must be found within a textbook adoption process. As the Board asked itself in May of 1974, "Whose version of right or perfect should we take and under what conditions, obligations, or sacrifices do we accept that version of perfection?"<sup>143</sup> The Board members quickly answered themselves by prioritizing professional expertise and judgement and excluding public and parental engagement. However, as the November guidelines and procedures and sterilized textbooks that followed reflect, an imbalance weighted towards overreaching parental engagement does not create the best education either. Value-free or neutral education is nearly impossible and, as the anti-textbook leaders indicated, merely meant non-controversial according to their own values and traditions. Open dialogue and synergism between the public and the institution must be desired and created if there is any hope of producing a balanced curriculum.

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<sup>140</sup> February 2, 1977, The Daily Mail.

<sup>141</sup> "A Textbook Study in Cultural Conflict", 344.

<sup>142</sup> "A Textbook Study in Cultural Conflict", 347.

<sup>143</sup> State of West Virginia, "Department of Education", 5.

### Kanawha County Dialogue

In April 1976, about a year after the controversy had cooled down, Kanawha County Dialogue Incorporated was created by community members in the county. The group was established to foster dialogue amongst members of the community from diverse backgrounds and beliefs and to show that such dialogue could create public understanding and working relationships. The group promoted such dialogue for the goal of, “living together harmoniously and constructively,” as well as to promote “the capability of the people of Kanawha County to continue to recognize their shared goals and reciprocate with trustful, respecting communication.”<sup>144</sup>

The creation of this organization was a significant step for the county and reflected a desire to mend relations amongst community members. Compared to other community members, such as preachers who claimed that differing worldviews could never be reconciled, this attempt to foster such dialogue marked an optimistic step forward. The group organized three-day small-group dialogue sessions in 1977. Though the anti-textbook faction had successfully removed the controversial books and the anti-textbook favoring guidelines were still in place, the community’s attempt to facilitate an all-inclusive dialogue to, “explore their similarities and differences,” indicated a community unwilling to merely give up on evolving the role of public education.<sup>145</sup>

The sponsored dialogue sessions occurred between seventeen community members. The individuals were invited by the group because of their expressed interest in education and their skill and willingness to articulate a point of view. Community

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<sup>144</sup> Kanawha County Dialogue, April 1976, 2.

<sup>145</sup> Kanawha County Dialogue, 3.

members included individuals who were members of AFL-CIO Appalachian Council, Fike Chemical Company, the Board of Education, Chevrolet employees, college professors, and high school students, amongst other members. Though the selection of the group clearly favored those with a preexisting interest in education issues, the variance of members and diversity of backgrounds allow the outcomes to reflect a wide swath of the community.

The participants were first divided into small homogenous groups called “Contemporary I”, “Contemporary II”, “Traditional I” and “Traditional II”. The source does not state how the individuals were divided. The participants could have self-selected their groups and or were unaware of the titles of the groups. As with any grouping of individuals, if they had been aware of their group titles and the implied beliefs of their group-members, certain biases or group-think could have emerged in the generation of questions that would not necessarily have occurred without overt awareness of group similarities. The answer to such inquiry is unknown. In any case, within these homogenous groups over 100 questions were created. All of the questions reflect important perceptions, understandings, and beliefs that are crucial in analyzing the impact of the controversy on the community’s notions of the role of public education.

Within the Contemporary I group, the most relevant questions dealt with themes of trust and the roles of various community actors in decision making. First, the group believed that the textbook controversy was caused by political extremists exploiting a large group of citizens with an emotional appeal. This understanding was consistent with the pro-textbook faction and clearly influenced their perception of the controversy and its impact. Contemporary I group expressed concern about teacher’s accountability, asking

how teachers can be held accountable for what they teach, and about the functioning role of Parental Advisory Committees, asking about how PACs can better function. Both questions reflected varying levels of trust in educators and parents in the teaching and decision making process. In regards to curriculum development, the group implored about children using reason to make decisions or only being taught facts, the use of Christian Education in public schools, and if students should have input in the development of curriculum.<sup>146</sup>

From the Contemporary II group, three questions in particular were incredibly relevant. The group asked, how can we develop a mutually comprehensible vocabulary so that we can discuss education? How can we run a school district with as little consensus as we have in Kanawha County in lifestyle and philosophy? And, are the schools the scapegoats for the breakdown in family life and the decline in morals? These three questions were reflective of shared community sentiments and notions about public education post-controversy. Firstly, the desire to create a mutually comprehensible vocabulary reflected the widely held notion that the controversy emphasized the lack of clear community communication surrounding education. The second question is truly the crux of this research. The fact that the group was asking this question reflects their desire to grapple with and try to generate answers to how a public school system can remain balanced with so many conflicting philosophies and lifestyles. Unfortunately, at the time of the dialogue session, it appeared that the school district chose the option of presenting simplified, basic narratives in an attempt to quell the tension between conflicting groups.

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<sup>146</sup> Kanawha County Dialogue, 4.

Lastly, the third question reflects the group's beliefs that public education was bearing the brunt of the blame amidst numerous cultural and familial generational changes.

The questions asked by the two "contemporary" groups remained consistent with pro-textbook and more liberal factors of the Kanawha community. The questions reflected their concern for greater student input, the questioning and or protest of religion in public schools, and an emphasis on both parent and teacher input. Most importantly however, the contemporary groups acknowledged the complexities facing the public school system and the complicated role of public education in a diverse community.

The Traditional I group's question focused mainly on religion and discipline in public education. Their questions reflected the belief that discipline has "completely broken down in our school system." They asked, "Why do we need values clarification when we don't want our children's values tampered with or changed?" which directly emphasized the group's belief in the role of public education as a noncontributing actor in moral development. Their questions reflected a less than favorable opinion of the School Board, asking questions such as "How can we ever trust school officials who are repeatedly less than honest?" and "Why do we need so many flunkies at the Board of Education? They have not improved our system of learning." Furthermore they implied that they currently believe that public schools are indoctrinating students in the "humanistic, socialist philosophy." Their views and questions are important because they seem to reflect a perception amongst the "traditionalists" that the controversy did not end in their favor. Despite guidelines that seem to overtly favor the anti-textbook coalition, they still felt that public schools were teaching humanistic, socialist philosophies and that

teachers were not dedicated to their profession. In addition the group asked, “What is the purpose of education?” and “What is the role of the School Board in the community?”<sup>147</sup>

Lastly, the Traditional II group’s questions reflected their belief that public schools should focus on themes of patriotism rather than attempting to provide moral guidance. The group also implored if a minority group has the right to reject offensive material and if discipline in the classroom necessary.<sup>148</sup> All of the groups asked questions about how to improve communication between the School Board and the public and reflected sentiments of feeling left out of the decision making process.

Throughout the process the participants were described as cautious, polite, hesitant, uncomfortable, tense, irritated, relieved, and satisfied. After eighteen hours of discussion and debate, the homogenous groups were divided into heterogeneous groups for the purpose of writing their resulting ideas and recommendations. At the end of the three days, individuals did not want to leave and agreed to meet again to pursue some of their suggestions.<sup>149</sup> Participants claim to have left with the “recognition that individuals hold different opinions and each person’s position is valid.”<sup>150</sup>

Most of the recommendations did not deal with the complex questions asked but instead with structural changes to the Board of Education, communication improvements, and curricula suggestions. The groups sought to limit Board member terms, improve teacher and principal evaluation forms, and suggested a few different ways to improve public and Board communication. The only recommendations of potentially controversial

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<sup>147</sup> Kanawha County Dialogue, 6.

<sup>148</sup> Kanawha County Dialogue, 7.

<sup>149</sup> It is unknown if the individuals did in fact meet afterwards.

<sup>150</sup> Kanawha County Dialogue, 8.



substance were the suggestions that a world religion class be instituted into the high school curriculum, with the prior understanding that no conversion or persuasion of faith be taught, a course on “Getting Along with Others” should be taught at the elementary level, and a course on child development and parenting should be taught at every high school. All three of the recommendations were not unanimously considered because of the overarching moral tones required of all three of the courses.

Though the groups did not generate answers or recommendations to most of the complex questions they posed, bringing a group of diverse individuals together and fostering a peaceful dialogue in which such questions could be asked represented a significant step towards improving community interactions and deliberations about such controversial topics. Considering the gunshots, firebombs, and school disruptions that rocked the county just two years before, peacefully asking important questions amongst varied community actors was significant.

All of the participants agreed that before mutual problems could be resolved, a sense of trust must be developed between diverse groups. “The key to the solution of problems is a sense of trust. This thought was expressed pre and post to this experience. Perhaps a representative democracy depends on trust to function.”

The controversy represents an extreme case of what happens in a community when the lack of trust between diverse community members is destroyed. The controversy arose because the Board of Education did not trust parents to make decisions about textbooks, the parents did not trust their children, the teachers, or the Board to introduce and understand complex and controversial narratives, and turned violent because groups refused to listen past their shouting and fears. The outcome of the

controversy, reflected in “watered-down” textbooks and strict parental scrutiny reflected a conscious fight to maintain parental moral and cultural values and influence over their children by shielding them from books that contain ideas or words with which their parents disagree.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> “Intellectual Rights”, 129.

## Conclusion

*“Is it so wrong to teach our children how other people think, act, and believe? Do you not feel that it would be better for our children to know all possible ways of thought, so that they might one day decide for themselves which path they might take in life. One cannot keep his children enclosed in a protective environment all their long and natural life. Would it be fair to your children to know only your small world?”<sup>152</sup>*

The textbook controversy of 1974 did not remain within the Kanawha County limits. The following year, “protests explode[d] across the nation.” In places as diverse as Randolph, New York, Tampa, Florida, and Aurora, Colorado, community members began demanding changes in teaching methods and materials they felt jeopardized their traditional values. Though protests did not spiral to the same level of violence, their demands were similar to those voiced in West Virginia. Concerned parents and teachers wanted schools to re-emphasize the basic skills and traditional values – “the Three R’s, patriotism, and respect for authority” – and many credited the West Virginia protests for prompting their awareness. On the pro-textbook side, a teacher rights specialist from the National Education Association stated that, “there’s hardly a day now that a new dispute doesn’t crop up somewhere... We’ve got a real problem on our hands.”<sup>153</sup>

In 1981, Publisher’s Weekly, a book publishing journal, published an article titled “A Tough Time for Textbooks.” The article opened stating, “It can have escaped no one’s

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<sup>152</sup> November 2, 1974, The Charleston Gazette, Letter to the Editor.

<sup>153</sup> July 23, 1975, The Daily Mail, “State-Spawned Protest Explodes Across Nation.”

notice by now that a significant share of the clout once wielded by liberals is in the hands of conservative forces.” However, the numerous textbook publishers interviewed agreed that the issues arising were not new but “because of the increased awareness of the public, there is much greater visibility these days.”<sup>154</sup>

The visibility of such issues has continued into the present. Current examples of such contention, among many, include fervent debates over California public schools working with Planned Parenthood to provide high school sex education and Oklahoma’s potential ban on funding for AP U.S. History courses in light of the new College Board curriculum that many conservatives claim, “emphasizes what is bad about America.”<sup>155</sup> In many school districts around the country, community members continue to demand greater involvement in and control of academic decision making. Clearly, the same fears about textbooks and public education that arose in Kanawha County in 1974 are still felt around the country in 2016.

What is at risk with imbalanced public control of education? If a community truly feels that their public schools should reflect their commonly held beliefs then little is endanger of stringent public involvement in educational decision making. That is however, if a community can genuinely come to a consensus of exactly what their commonly held beliefs are. Because few communities are able to do so, peacefully at least, great risk is posed to the integrity of education if the public is allowed to control the narratives presented in public schools.

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<sup>154</sup> Publisher’s Weekly, “A Tough Time for Textbooks,” 1981, 28.

<sup>155</sup> Snyder, Jeffrey Aaron. “America Will Never Move Beyond the Culture Wars.” The New Republic. April 23, 2015. Accessed May 08, 2015. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/121627/war-soul-america-history-culture-wars-review>.

In order to create adults who are capable of critical decision making, curriculum control cannot be left to the whims of parental decision making over what they feel their children should learn or be exposed to. Students, educators, parents, and community members cannot let intolerance or fear dictate and shout out other world views that create greater complexities and prompt harder questions.

In studying the controversy in West Virginia, I sought to explore the questions that have increasingly become difficult to answer about the rights of students, parents, and teachers as well as the role that public education should and can play in shaping identities and moralities. The protests escalated with such ferocity for a multitude of reasons, including a massive single school district responsible for a great diversity of students and lifestyles and charismatic protest leadership, and provides an incredible example of both extreme violence and attempts at deep self-reflection.

Perhaps the largest lesson to learn from studying the controversy in West Virginia was articulated in the concluding statements of the Kanawha County Dialogue. Learning and teaching how to reconcile complexities, make tough decisions, and value diverse opinions is fundamental to education and is the best preparation for a positive future marked with greater compromises and tolerance. Though the community members involved in the Dialogue workshop recognized these basic tenets, the guidelines that stifled their students' ability to learn such skills remained in place.

Public schools must be a place where students learn to disagree and debate important issues related to their identities, communities, and nation. This cannot occur when the curriculum is controlled by an imbalance of parental input over professional educators.

Through this research I gained a newfound appreciation for the very real fears of parental alienation and distance from their children. The fear that the morals and intellectual guidance a child receives in a classroom that a parent is not present in and that could be vastly different from the values instilled at home is absolutely genuine and valid.

I have also gained a deep appreciation for the impact of textbooks on shaping students' notions of identity and community. As evinced by the controversy in Kanawha County, textbooks have the potential to have an incredible impact. In 1974, community members fought to maintain their definitions of who was an American, a Christian, a patriot, and a moral individual through language arts curriculum.

I do not know the answer to the perfect balance between parents, professional educators, and students. I think that as long as we maintain a public education system that is funded through taxpayer dollars, we will continue to debate and disagree about the answers to the role that public education should play and who should make curriculum decisions. The power of textbooks in shaping students' understandings of their identity within a community, country, and world is far too important and powerful claims of legitimacy are present on all sides of the debate.

We need public schools that will create citizens capable of having such debates – individuals that prioritize trust, communication, and respect for the diversity of thoughts that exist in every community – and this starts with showing students that the world is filled with many different voices and stories.

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